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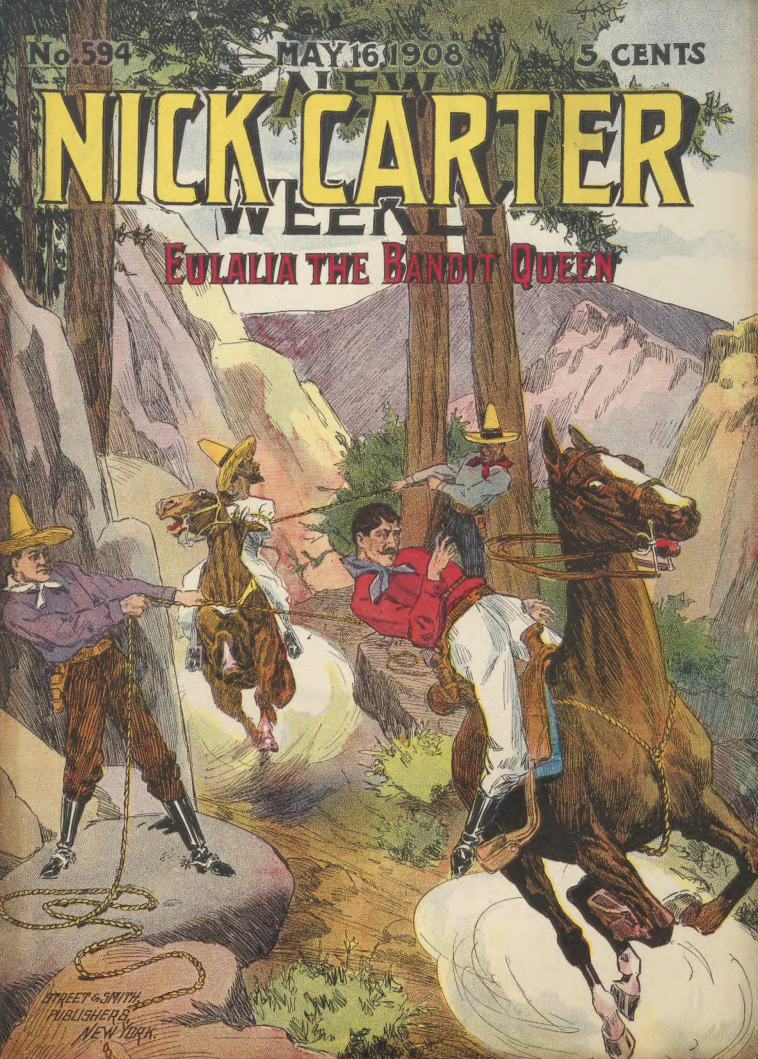
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

EULALIA THE BANDIT QUEEN



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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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Eulalia, the Bandit Queen

OR,

NICK CARTER'S CHASE ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A LETTER FROM A BANDIT.

Nick Carter, together with Mr. Joseph Chittenden, of London, England, with his son Hal, a young man of twenty-two, and his daughter Rose, nineteen, were guests of Señora Del Puente at her beautiful home in the village of Coyocan, which is located just outside the City of Mexico. There were two other guests also. They were the Earl of Darnley, better known as Jack Douglas, and Eulalia Montez,* whose father, at the close of his life, was a chief of bandits, and whose ancestors on her mother's side had been Mexican bandits as far back as there was any trace of them.

There are people who believe that banditism is now defunct in Mexico, and it is in the abstract; but the blood of many generations of descent is there, and it chafes at all forms of restraint, recognizing no laws made by the government, unless compelled to do so, and then only in appearance.

A word as to the reasons for Nick Carter's presence at the house in Coyocan with the others.

In the beginning, the son and daughter of Mr. Chittenden had been mysteriously abducted† while touring Mexico, and Nick had gone there with the father to find them. It was discovered, on investigation, that Miguel Montez—the father of Eulalia—who had for years been in the service of the family of Señor Del Puente, had stolen them away in revenge for a wrong he believed their father had done to his mistress when she was a girl in Europe.

That they were found and rescued was due entirely to the sagacity of Nick Carter; but one consequence of it was that old Miguel fled to the mountains, and there organized a company of bandits; and when he fled from the hacienda which belonged to the señora, he took his beautiful young daughter Eulalia with him.

The old Spaniard naturally attributed all his misfortunes to the Chittendens, and so, after he became a bandit chief, he again sought to be avenged, with the result that with the aid of his men he stole Mr. Chittenden himself away from Coyocan, and then abducted Rose again.

Once more Nick Carter took up the chase, this time accompanied by Hal Chittenden, and by an old Mexican

*See No. 593, NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

†See No. 592, NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

who was in the employ of the detective, Primitivo by name, whose father and grandfathers before him had been bandit chiefs.*

Primitivo believed he knew the secret place in the mountains of Michoacan to which the prisoners had been taken. It had once been the headquarters of his grandfather, and of his father, and he had himself passed much of his youth there, so he knew every secret of the locality, although many years had passed since he had visited there.

But they found the place, and the bandits; they also discovered the prisoners, and rescued them; but in the search after them, Nick Carter came upon a treasure which the ancestors of Primitivo had hidden there.

One of the developments of the case was the fact that the mother of Eulalia had been Primitivo's sister, and Nick decided that the treasure should be equally divided between the two, Eulalia and Primitivo; but it was left there where it was found, for the present; it being determined that Primitivo would return for it later.

And now, at the time of the opening of this story, they were all safely back again in the home of the señora at Coyocan, where they were, indeed, welcome guests, since an old romance between Joseph Chittenden and the señora—which happened when she was Mercedes de Echeverria—had been renewed, and they were to be married shortly.

Eulalia, too, was a welcome guest there, for she had done much in assisting in the rescue of Rose and Rose's father from the bandits; so much that Mr. Chittenden had told her that she must regard herself as an adopted daughter of his own henceforth.

The time was Sunday evening, and the entire party were gathered under the spreading branches of a huge tree in the señora's grounds, surrounded by high walls, at the rear of the large house in which she lived.

Save for the shadow that was over Eulalia because of the recent and harrowing death of her father, whom she had loved in spite of his faults, it was a happy party, and they had been talking and laughing together enjoyably for a long time, while Primitivo hung about on the margin of the group, ready to answer the slightest wishes of any of them.

Then a servant appeared, approaching them from the house, and in a moment he gave a sealed envelope into Eulalia's hand and turned away, remarking as he did so:

"No immediate answer, señorita."

Wonderingly, Eulalia broke the seal and spread the letter open before her; but she found that there was not sufficient light to read it, and so, excusing herself, she left them and passed into the house.

Nick was rather surprised at the occurrence, too, for he had heard Eulalia say that she had no friends or ties in Mexico. She had always lived on the hacienda with her father, until he fled to the mountains. Primitivo also looked annoyed, and Nick could see him shrugging his shoulders frequently; a sure sign that his thoughts disturbed him.

Eulalia was gone a long time; so long that the detective was just thinking about going in search of her when she reappeared.

For a moment she stood in the doorway with the open letter in her hand, and then she called out to the detective:

"Señor Carter! May I trouble you for a moment? Will you please come here?"

He rose at once and went to her, and, turning, she led the way into the house and to the library, where a light was burning.

"Please pardon me for calling you away from the others," she said, "but I felt that I must show this strange letter to somebody. Will you read it, please?"

The detective received the letter in his hand and stepped closer to the light.

It was written in Spanish, of course, but a free translation of it would be as follows:

"SENORITA EULALIA MONTEZ, great-granddaughter of Don Manuel de Soto, granddaughter of Don Eulogio de Soto, daughter of Maria Anita de Soto, and niece of Primitivo de Soto—and therefore descendant of a long line of bandit chieftains: To you, Greeting.

"SENORITA: It has come to the knowledge of the writer of this letter, who and what you are, and inasmuch as we have need of you and of your services, the letter is written in all respect and esteem, but also with a full intention to carry out the terms of it whether it shall be done with your permission, or without it.

"Your mother was the direct descendant of a long line of chieftains, and we believe that you are her most worthy daughter. The fact that your father was a Spaniard, and that he had none of the blood of the bandits in his veins, might have spared you the necessity of doing what we shall ask here, were it not for the fact that at the close of his life he forsook his former way of living, fled to the mountains, and made himself exactly what your ancestors on your mother's side had been—a bandit chief.

"We, who send this letter to you, know that your ancestors accumulated a large treasure, which is now hidden somewhere in the vicinity of the Plaza Abajo, from which place you and others were lately rescued by one Señor Carter, with the aid of your uncle, Primitivo de Soto, who by rights should be among us, but whom we have consented to pass by, since he has for so long a time repudiated everything that is associated with his former life.

"But to you, señorita, we say this: You are our natu-

*See No. 593 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

ral head and chief, and we desire that you come among us, to rule us, and to direct our efforts toward that great liberty which only your ancestors and mine knew how to enjoy properly. We are fifty in number here at the camp; there are two hundred others who belong to us scattered about the state of Guerrero and our men are constantly at work securing new recruits, so that ultimately—and that in a very short time—we expect to count our numbers by thousands, mostly Guerrerans, and all determined that the great state of Guerrero belongs to us, and not to the present government of Mexico.

"It is our purpose, as soon as we become strong enough to do so, to bid defiance to the government, to declare our independence, and to govern our own state to suit ourselves, and after the patterns that were set for us so long ago by your illustrious ancestors. We shall be bandits only in so far as that pursuit is necessary to supply funds for our patriotic and laudable purposes, but until we can declare ourselves, we shall prey upon all those who oppose us, believing that we have a perfect right to do so.

"Your uncle, Primitivo, is, of course, our natural chief; but he is an old man, and, moreover, we cannot fully trust him. Therefore it has been decided at council that we pass him by for you; and so now we ask you, in the name of the Patriots of Guerrero, to come to us and be our queen. In doing so your every wish shall be gratified, your every want supplied; you shall be shown the respect that a veritable queen would receive, you shall pick a husband where you choose—in short, you shall, in all respects, be all that the title bestowed upon you signifies.

"To-morrow night, at midnight, near the two rocks that are called the 'Needles,' ten miles out from Coyocan, an escort of twelve men will await you, and they will be prepared to conduct you to a place where the rest of our immediate band of fifty will be in waiting to receive you—and we insist that you must accept this proposition, and come to us at once.

"As for the fortune that is half yours, and which is concealed somewhere at Plaza Abajo, we will expect that your part of it will be devoted to our cause; but, in justice to you, the half that should be Primitivo's will be left there for him, untouched.

"Lastly, there is something to say which it is hoped you will not regard as a threat, but which is meant just as it is stated here, and which we hope you will understand.

"It is this: If you should for any reason see fit to refuse this great offer that is made to you by the patriots, we shall take measures to bring you among us by force, believing, as we do, that because you are young it will only be a question of weeks, or perhaps days, when you will enter heart and soul with us upon our patriotic undertakings.

"I have the honor to be, señorita, in the name of the Guerreran Patriots,

"Your most humble and obedient servant,

"TRANQUILINO MORALES,
"Acting Chief."

The detective raised his head when he had finished reading the letter, and with a smile, remarked:

"Eulalia, that is by far the most remarkable document I ever read. Do you know anything about the man who has signed it?"

"No," she replied. "I have never heard of him."

"He seems to know all about you, all right."

"Yes."

"We will call Primitivo and ask him. Perhaps he will understand it."

CHAPTER II.

A QUEEN AMONG OUTLAWS.

The detective stepped to the door and called Primitivo, and when he came, said to him:

"Eulalia has received a most remarkable letter from a man who calls himself Tranquilino Morales. Do you know such a man?"

"Yes. I used to know him well. He is my cousin."

"Your cousin. Then he is also descended from the bandit chieftains."

"He is, señor."

"Where does Morales make his home?"

"I do not know, señor, save that it is somewhere in the state of Guerrera."

"Listen, Primitivo, and I will read you the letter your cousin has written to your niece."

The detective then read the letter through slowly, and aloud, pausing from time to time to give the ex-bandit time to digest what was said; and when he finished it, he laid it aside, and said:

"That is the letter, Primitivo. What do you think of it?"

"I think, señor, if you could prevail upon the entire party to start north by train to-morrow morning, instead of waiting till the end of the week, as has been determined upon, it would be the safest thing for Eulalia. She should be gotten out of the country at once."

"Do you mean to tell me that you take this letter seriously?" asked Nick; and he tapped the letter on the table with his finger.

Primitivo inclined his head.

"I do, señor," he replied.

"Do you honestly believe that letter to have been written in all seriousness?"

"I certainly do."

"It looks to me as if it were only a bid for that treasure, which somehow they have learned we discovered."

"No, señor, you are mistaken."

"How so?"

"I do not think that Tranquilino has the least idea that we found the treasure. He merely knows it to be there; just as I knew it to be there. But he believes it can be found."

"Do you suppose the man is crazy enough to believe that he can organize a band of patriots who will free Guerrero from the rule of Mexico?"

"I have not a doubt of it."

"But it is—what shall I call it?—ludicrous?"

"Granted, señor; but you could not make the Guerrerans believe that."

"Possibly not."

"Señor, the native Guerrerans are different from any other people in Mexico. They are descended from a different race altogether. They are taller men, more warlike, braver—in a word, they are totally different from all the others."

"I have always understood that."

"Until President Diaz secured control of the country, the Guerrerans kept themselves entirely independent. True, they made a show of giving allegiance to Mexico, but it was only on the surface. And even after the rise of Diaz they were for a long time as independent as ever."

"I have been told that also."

"But little by little the president extended his authority and his rule, until now Guerrero is as much a chattel of Mexico as is the state of Chihuahua, or Tamulipas, or Sonora."

The detective nodded.

"There are Guerrerans by the thousands who would sacrifice anything they have in the world to secure their freedom from the rule of Mexico. The only reason why they have not broken out in open rebellion long ago, and kept up the fight, has been because they have no regular leader, who is, by the ties of blood, a lineal descendant of the old leaders."

"Go on, Primitivo. You are getting interesting."

"Within the borders of the state, right now, there are perhaps twenty-five men who all claim the right to lead. Morales is one of them; and, so far as their descent is concerned, they all have an equal right to lead. Do you understand me?"

"Yes."

"I am the only living natural leader for them, but I have refused, time after time, to join with them in a warfare, because I understand the folly of it, and know only too well how it must end at last."

"Of course."

"And so I understand this letter."

"Well?"

"That a score or more of chiefs have got together and discussed the matter. They have agreed among themselves that if Eulalia could be induced to come among them, they would bow allegiance to her, make her absolute ruler over them, make her a queen, in fact, as Morales says here, and they believe that she could keep the warring elements together under her rule, and that her presence, as their rightful leader, would forever do away with civil strife among them. Do you understand now why they have sent for her?"

"Yes. I begin to do so."

"The letter says plainly that they intend to have her, too If not willingly, then they will take her by force. That is the substance of it."

"Yes."

"And therefore I say to you that the only safe place for Eulalia now is somewhere beyond the borders of Mexico. Guerrerans never let go once they have taken hold."

"I have noticed that characteristic about you, Primitivo," said the detective, smiling.

"It belongs to my race, señor. Shall I tell you exactly how this thing has come about?"

"Yes."

"Tranquilino Morales may have started it. I know him to be a patriot. We, who were called bandits, did not consider ourselves robbers, as you understand the word."

"I suppose not."

"We never preyed upon our own people; but we considered the people of other states our natural foes, and we preyed upon them without mercy."

"Yes."

"In reality we called ourselves patriots."

"One name is as good as another, I suppose."

"Tranquilino Morales, my cousin, is a patriot of the patriots. He believes that there is no other place on earth than Guerrero; no other people under heaven than Guerrerans. He has seen the futility of thoroughly organizing his countrymen so long as there was so much jealousy and strife among them respecting who should lead. He knew that it was useless to apply to me, the natural leader, since I have so often refused to join with them against Mexico."

"Well?"

"So he has doubtless traced out the history of my sister. He has discovered that she had a daughter, and that Eulalia is that daughter. He has told himself: 'Here is a leader for us. It does not matter that she is a woman; she is a De Soto, and she shall be our queen.'"

"Well?"

"After that he has gone about through the country, from one leader to another, securing their consent to his ideas. They have given it, and appointed a place of meeting where they could all get together. There, in that

selected place, they have met in solemn conclave, and they have balloted for and elected Eulalia their queen.

"And she would be made a queen in fact, señor, if she should accept this offer, and go among them. No royal scepter would be more potent than hers; no queen on earth would be more literally obeyed than she would be. Her rule would be absolute, with the power of life and death. She would appoint her own generals as she saw fit."

"She would be literally an American queen, eh?"

"A Guerreran queen, señor."

"It is a position that would attract most young women," said the detective, glancing with a smile in his eyes toward Eulalia.

"Not I," she replied.

"But it would be the height of folly,' continued Primitivo. "The moment they declared their independence, the moment they asserted their right to be free, Diaz would turn the entire force of his army against them, and there would be a continuous warfare as long as they held to their assertion that they were free and independent."

"And it would not take long for the army to crush the Guerrerans, would it?"

"That is just the point, señor, that you do not understand."

"Then explain it to me."

"The Guerrerans could never be driven out of their own mountains. It would take a million soldiers to do that, and Mexico could never raise so many."

"No."

"But they would be penned up within the borders of their own state, within the fastnesses of their own mountains, until they surrendered; and every man and woman among them would be declared outlawed. They would be imprisoned and shot whenever captured. It would be a war of extermination on one side, and a war for a bare living on the other; and it would end in Eulalia's being a queen of mere bandits; nothing more."

"But why do you think she is in danger while she is here with us, Primitivo?"

"Because I read from that letter that they have already elected her their queen."

"They would want a willing queen."

"They say right here that she is young, and that once among them, it would not be long before she gave them her entire sympathy, even though she refused it at first. And about that I believe they are correct."

"You do?"

"Yes, señor. Power is a great thing. Some philosopher has said that he would rather be a king among hogs than a hog among kings; and he was right. If Eulalia were taken prisoner to-night by my countrymen, and were carried away into the mountains of Guerrera, it would not be six months, perhaps not three, maybe less than one, before she would be as enthusiastic a queen as they could wish. I have felt the thrill of power, señor. I know what it means."

"But that brings us back to my original question. How is she in danger here, among us, and so near the City of Mexico?"

"Bah! They would go to the palace itself to get her if they had determined to do so. Was not Mr. Chittenden abducted from this very garden that surrounds this house? Was not the Señorita Chittenden taken bodily from the house itself? And all that was done by a mere Spaniard, too. Would a Guerreran hesitate? Besides, that letter tells me that they have already elected her their queen."

"You said that once before. Tell me what you mean by it."

"I mean that having elected her, she is from their standpoint their queen."

"Well?"

"And that therefore they now regard her as a prisoner here among you."

"Oh."

"They have sworn allegiance to her. They have relinquished their own personal authority in order that it might fall upon her. They want her, and if she remains in Mexico, they will get her. There is no safe place for her anywhere between the Guatamalan line and the Rio Grande River, señor."

"Then she must be sent out of Mexico, Primitivo."

"Yes. And at once, señor. To-morrow, even, may be too late."

CHAPTER III.

THE NIGHT ATTACK.

"I think," said the detective, after a short pause, "that the others of our party should be taken into our confidence at once, Primitivo, if you really believe the situation to be as serious as you say."

"They should be; yes."

"I doubt, however, if the señora can make her arrangements to leave for the north in the morning."

"It is not necessary that she should leave at once. It is only important that Eulalia should do so."

"I understand that."

"And if I may make a suggestion——"

"Certainly; make it."

"The young Señor Chittenden and his sister might start by the morning train for the north. They could wait across the border, in the United States, for the rest of us."

"What? Will you go north with us?"

"I will go that far, and then return. I would not be happy out of Mexico, as you know."

"Yes. I thought I knew it.

"We will consult them," said Nick, "and determine what is best to do."

"One moment, if you please," said Eulalia, who had remained silent up to that moment. "I think it would be only right to consult *me* just a little about this matter."

"You do not mean, do you," asked Nick, "that you are giving the matter of the proposition any serious thought."

"You know I do not mean that, Señor Carter; but I do mean that I should be consulted about the time of leaving here."

"Pardon me, Eulalia," said Primitivo, "but that is something that you can know nothing about. Although you are half a Guerreran, you know nothing about Guerrerans. I do. I know that they mean what they say. Even to-night I shall not close my eyes. I shall keep watch outside the house until daylight, fearing all the time that an attack may be made."

"Do you mean that, Primitivo?" asked Nick.

"Certainly I mean it. Guerrerans do not wait. That letter was brought here by a messenger. The curtains at the windows have not been lowered. If there are spies watching us from the outside—and there is not the slightest doubt of it—it is already reported that Eulalia first called you, and that then you called me, in consultation over its contents."

"I see," said the detective.

"And they know only too well what I would advise. They know by implication what you would advise, señor."

"To be sure."

"And they would naturally suppose that Eulalia would follow the advice we gave, would they not?"

"I should suppose so."

"Therefore it is a foregone conclusion with them that Eulalia will decline their offer. In fact, I have no doubt that it was a foregone conclusion with them from the first, and that they have made their preparations accordingly."

"Another abduction, Primitivo?"

"If you are pleased to call it that, yes. I mean that they intend to steal Eulalia away from us in case she declines to accept the offer. That is all there is about it."

"We must prevent that. I will keep watch with you to-night, if you think it necessary."

"No; I do not think it necessary. I can call you if occasion should require. I hardly think they would make an attack to-night. And, besides, they know nothing about your plans for going away. They cannot know but there will be plenty of time."

"Possibly not."

The detective rose and went to the door, and from there he called Hal and Rose to him.

Leading them into the library, he explained in a few words what had happened, and read the letter to them. Then he said:

"Hal, do you think you and Rose could make ready to take the morning train out of Mexico for El Paso?"

"I could start now, if necessary," replied Hal.

"And so could I," added Rose Chittenden. "If the safety of Eulalia is in question, we cannot start too soon, Mr. Carter."

"That is true, Rose."

"Only it will interfere with my father's plans for his wedding."

"Even so, I don't think he or the señora will object when they are made to understand the situation."

"No. Perhaps not."

"They can have the same quiet wedding without you; or they can postpone the wedding until they have crossed the border into the United States. Then you can witness it just the same."

"They will not consent to postpone it, either of them," said Rose, smiling. "We will not ask them to do that. We will only ask them to let us go on ahead."

"Call them here, then," said the detective, "and we will put it to them."

And so Mr. Chittenden and the señora were called into the consultation, and presently were made familiar with all its ramifications.

"Go ahead by all means," said the señora. "Let us have no more abductions. There have been too many of them already. Eulalia, we love you too dearly to run any risk of losing you, my child."

"Thank you, señora. It is very good of you."

"And Rose, your father and I will be married quietly on the day set, and immediately after we will follow you to El Paso, where you will await us; you and Hal and Eulalia. Mr. Carter, shall you go with them, or remain here with us?"

"I have been thinking about that. I think I will send Primitivo with them, and that I will remain here for the wedding."

"Thank you for that."

"Anyhow, Carter," said Mr. Chittenden, "you have promised to be best man. Don't forget that, will you?"

"That was what I had in mind, sir."

"But, really, Carter, it seems to me that we are borrowing trouble unnecessarily. I do not believe that these Guerrerans would dare attack this house; do you?"

"Señor," said Primitivo, "they would not hesitate to attack the palace itself, if they came here in sufficient numbers. And they will do that—I mean come in sufficient numbers, for they are coming after their queen, and already they feel some doubt as to her willingness to go with them."

"I shouldn't think they would want an unwilling queen."

"Señor Carter said the same thing. But they count on

making her willing after they have taken her to Guerrero and thrust the scepter of power into her hands. They may even make an attack here to-night."

"Oh, I do not think that. When did the letter arrive?"

"An hour ago."

"Who brought it?"

"It is not known; but one of the men who are here to escort the queen back to Guerrero brought it, you may be sure. And he was not alone. Within the village of Coyocan at this moment, or at least within easy distance of it, I have no doubt that there are at least fifty of those men; perhaps a hundred."

"They would be a difficult party to handle if once they got Eulalia in their power; eh?" said Chittenden.

"Not only that, but they would make with all speed for Guerrero, and once there——" He stopped.

"Well? Once there—what?"

"Mr. Chittenden," said Primitivo impressively, "did you ever see the old fort, now called the prison, of San Juan de Ulca, at Vera Cruz?"

"Yes."

"Do you think you could attack it alone and win your way into it?"

"Hardly that, Primitivo. Why do you ask that?"

"Because such a feat would be child's play compared with following those Guerrerans into their own mountains in Guerrero, and taking therefrom their queen. It could not be done—unless by strategy. It could never be accomplished by force."

"Then I think, Mr. Carter"—Chittenden turned and faced the detective—"that we had better settle it that Hal and Rose, with Eulalia, and with Primitivo as guard over them, leave the City of Mexico on the morning train for El Paso. Do you agree with me?"

"Yes."

"Very good. Rose, you have some preparations to make—you and Eulalia. You had better go and attend to them, don't you think?"

"Yes, father. Come, Eulalia. We will go to our room and begin to make ready."

Mr. Chittenden, never forgetful of his courtesy, rose and held the door open for the two young women to pass out. Then he returned to his seat near the detective.

As he did so, Primitivo rose and started for the door, and Nick called to him.

"Where are you going, Primitivo?" he asked. "We might wish to discuss this matter further with you."

"There is no need of that, señor. I was going to keep watch over Eulalia while she and the señorita are packing."

"Perhaps they will not want you there, Primitivo."

"I will remain in the hall outside their door. That is all."

"Oh, all right. Go ahead, then."

When he was gone, Mr. Chittenden turned to Nick.

"Do you really think the matter is so serious, Mr. Carter?" he inquired.

"I would not think so, only for Primitivo. I have known him many years. Every time I come to Mexico he attaches himself to me. I saved his life once, long ago, and he insists that it belongs to me. I have never known him, in all the years of our acquaintance, to be unduly alarmed. He is one of the bravest men I ever knew, not only for himself, but for others as well. He knows those Guerrerans, since he is one of them himself. He knows what they are capable of doing, and he would not have advised as he did unless he saw plainly the necessity of it."

"Then it is well that we decided as we did."

"I think so."

"And all danger will be obviated by sending Eulalia out of the country at once?"

"Yes. As soon as she is on the train in the morning she will be safe; but, according to Primitivo, not until then."

"It seems incredible that such a thing could happen here, does it not?"

"Still, you were yourself abducted from this very place."

"But that was the work of a man who was mad. These men should be sane, and——"

He ceased abruptly in his speech, for at that instant a loud scream rang through the house, and he and the detective started to their feet with a bound.

In an instant they were in the hallway, and Nick was bounding up the stairs toward the second floor; but even as he reached the landing, a blinding flash flared in his eyes, a loud report followed it, and at the same instant he stumbled over the motionless form of Primitivo, and fell prostrate.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BANDITS LEAVE A THREAT.

The detective was not injured. The bullet did not touch him, and he instantly leaped to his feet, and, disregarding the silent form of Primitivo, sprang past it toward the door that communicated with the room that had been occupied by the girls.

He threw himself against it with all his weight, but it refused to budge, and he knew then that it had been fastened on the inside.

To burst in a door like that was humanly impossible without axes or crowbars, and he turned about quickly and retraced his steps to the stairs, bounding down them half a dozen steps at a time, bowling over Mr. Chittenden as he did so, and presently leaping out through the front entrance to the lawn.

Even as he did so, he dimly saw the figures of many

horsemen grouped in the road near the gate, and, as he dashed forward, they started away at a furious gallop, the hoofs of their horses clattering a defiant ring upon the hard earth of the street.

He dashed after them, but he might as well have chased a sunbeam, or a will-o'-the-wisp, for all the good it did him.

They were gone through the darkness ere he reached the roadway, turning around the corner behind the high wall, and spurring their horses into a swift run. When he reached the corner of the wall, pistol in hand, they were gone.

Slowly he returned to the house, telling himself vainly that both he and Primitivo should have known better than to have permitted the girls to go alone to their room; but, then, nobody thought of danger when they did that.

Then he recalled the fact that he had stumbled over the motionless body of Primitivo, and he hurried forward, fearing that the faithful old fellow had been killed.

He found Mr. Chittenden bending over him, and the señora pounding vainly against the door of the room where the girls had been packing, and he remembered then that the door had been fastened on the inside.

"Rose! Rose! Rose!" the señora was calling.

Nick wondered what had become of Hal, who had followed after him at the first alarm; and even as the thought came to him it was answered, for Hal opened that bedroom door from the inside, and appeared on the threshold. He had scaled the balcony from the outside and entered it by the window, even as the bandits had done.

His face was pale and drawn, and he looked the personification of impotent anger.

"Rose! Where is Rose?" gasped the señora.

"They are both gone," replied Hal dumbly. "My sister, and my sweetheart! Oh, my Heaven, what a horrible country this is, where a woman is not safe alone for a moment!"

He leaned against the wall as Nick passed him and entered the room.

It was only too true what Hal had said. The room was vacant. Both the girls had disappeared as if by magic.

Their things which they had been engaged in packing were scattered about the floor, and satchels and suitcase, half-filled, covered bed and chairs, showing how they had been employed when they were attacked.

One of the long windows, which reached from ceiling to floor, had been broken open, as if with a sudden blow from a club or an ax, for several of the panes were shattered.

But it demonstrated how the attack had been made. It had been an easy matter for the bandits to reach the balcony from the ground outside, and as soon as they knew the girls were alone and unprotected in that room, they had forced their way in.

Nick could reason how the rest of the affair had happened.

Primitivo, from outside the door, had doubtless heard the sound of breaking glass, and had known only too well what it meant. He had rushed into the room only to be met by a blow which had sent him staggering backward; and the man who attacked him, to make sure of what he had done, had followed him through the door, perhaps delivering a second blow.

And then he had seen Nick approaching up the stairs, and had fired at him as he reached the top, after which he had turned and escaped through the room, locking the door after him as he fled.

That was the explanation of it that Nick read in what he could see; and with a sigh he turned away, and went to the assistance of the others, who had now lifted Primitivo to a couch, and were ministering to him.

The Guerreran opened his eyes as Nick bent over him, and in a faint voice he asked:

"Did they get away, señor?"

"Yes," replied Nick.

"And did they take Eulalia with them?"

"Yes; and also Rose."

"What, the señorita also?"

"Yes."

"It is strange," he murmured. "I cannot understand that. It is not like them to do such a thing. It was one thing to come after their queen, regularly elected to rule over them, and they would dare anything to do that, but to take also the señorita. I do not understand that. I do not understand that."

He lifted himself to a sitting posture presently, and as Nick bent anxiously forward, asking him how he felt, he smiled grimly and replied:

"Señor, I have been shot to pieces and stabbed to pieces many times, and I am not dead yet. I shall not die now. It is only a blow on my head, that is all. It dazed me, but now my faculties are returning. Help me to rise, señor."

"You had better lie still a little while."

"No; I am better on my feet. I am accustomed to wounds. Let me have my way."

He groped wearily toward the now open door of the room from whence the girls had been taken, Nick going beside him; and just across the threshold he stopped and looked eagerly around him.

"Señor," he said, "I am still dazed by the blow; but there should be a knife somewhere here, sticking point downward into the floor, or into something. Can you see one?"

The detective shot his glances around the room from place to place, and at last stepped quickly forward toward the bed.

"Yes," he replied. "It is here. There is a piece of paper attached to it."

"I thought so, señor. There should be writing upon it. Will you read to me what is says?"

The detective had by this time secured the half-sheet of paper through which the blade of the knife had been thrust before it was stabbed into the bedding; and now he read aloud in Spanish:

"SENORS: We have taken the Señorita Chittenden with us only as hostage for your own conduct. This is written before we make the attack, because we have already decided what to do, and that it must be done to-night. We beg to say that Señorita Chittenden will be safe and well cared for, and will be returned to her father unharmed, and none the worse for her experiences, as soon as Eulalia shall have consented to become our queen, as my other letter outlined; and in any case at the expiration of three months, always provided that you make no effort during that time to pursue us. If you do make such effort, the señorita will never be returned to you, and will be given as wife to whoever may have the good fortune to win her regard—and that will come, even to her, in time. Remember, if you make no effort to pursue us, she will ultimately be restored to you unharmed. Remember, also, the alternative."

There was no signature to this remarkable document, but it was in the same handwriting as the letter received by Eulalia. There could be no mistaking that.

Primitivo reached out his hand.

"Give the letter to me," he said grimly.

"Why?" asked Nick, as he passed it over.

"Because, if aught happens to Señorita Rose, I will live to pin it fast to the naked heart of Tranquilino Morales. He is the writer, no?"

"Yes."

"I expected such a message when I knew they had taken the señorita with them."

"Primitivo, is there any use in securing horses at once and taking up the pursuit?"

"None whatever, señor."

"Then what is to be done? You know those men and their habits better than I."

"There is nothing—absolutely nothing that can be done at present. We must wait and we must think."

"And in the meantime—what?"

"In the meantime, señor, we must bear in mind that both the señorita and Eulalia are as safe from bodily harm as if they were here with us. No danger, threatens them save the one that we may never see them again; save the one that they have been ruthlessly torn from those they love, and carried away, one of them to become a queen if she will, the other——"

"Well? The other—for what?"

"You have read the message. You can reply to the question."

Hal Chittenden had followed them into the room, and now he exclaimed:

"And must we, because of that letter, sit idly, with folded hands, until Eulalia consents to become their queen? Faugh! It makes me sick!—or until three months have passed?"

"There is always strategy, señor," replied Primitivo, smiling.

"What do you mean by that remark?"

"I mean that while we may not follow them with force, we may pursue them in other ways. Do not forget that I am a Guerreran. Do not forget that I know Guerrero and Guerrerans. But we must think, think, think."

"Primitivo——" It was Hal who spoke again; and he stopped.

"Yes, señor?"

"Those fiends have made use of Rose to prevent us from following them. Do you think that they will also make use of her to induce Eulalia to accept their propositions?"

"It is more than likely. In fact, señor, that is the true reason why they took your sister with them."

The detective nodded his head.

"I see it all now," he murmured.

"It is this way," said Primitivo. "With the señorita in their power, they will say to Eulalia: 'We have your friend in our power. She is here, as you know. Accept our conditions, become our queen, rule over us as we wish you to do, and she shall be taken back at once to her people. Refuse, and she shall never leave Guerrero again as long as she lives.' It is something of that kind that they will say to Eulalia."

"And she cannot refuse."

"No. At least she will not."

"She will sacrifice herself for Rose."

"Naturally, señor; as I would sacrifice myself for Señor Carter under like circumstances; for I like you."

"Thank you, Primitivo. But must I forever give up hope of seeing Eulalia again?"

"I think not, señor. I think not. I hope not."

"But if she gives her word she will not break it."

"No; but she can be compelled to do so even against her will."

"How so? How do you mean?"

"She was stolen away from us, was she not? Then can she not be also stolen away from them, señor?"

"Do you think so?"

"I hope so; but by strategy only. We must think how it can be done."

CHAPTER V.

BEGINNING A PURSUIT BY STRATEGY.

"Hal," said the detective, when they were alone together, "I heard you use an expression, when you realized that the girls had been stolen from us, that told its own story. It gave me pleasure, too, my lad."

"What was it, Nick?"

"You referred to Eulalia as your sweetheart. Tell me this: Have you ever told her of your love for her?"

"No; I didn't know it myself until I found that she had been carried off by these devils. Why?"

"Wait. Have you reason to suppose that she loves you?"

"I don't know. I wish I did. But again, why?"

"Because if I were only sure that Eulalia loves you, I would feel easier about this matter."

"I don't see why."

"She would be less inclined to make those people who have taken her away an unqualified promise to remain among them. I know that Rose will not want her to make such a promise, unless it seems necessary to save her own life; and that is in no danger, at least, at the present time. Primitivo tells me that they will live up to their written promises, those Guerrerans."

"Nick, we are not to sit here idly and wait for those three months to pass, are we?"

"By no means."

"But what are we to do?"

"That is not determined yet. But Primitivo has something in his mind which he is slowly developing."

"And you think it best to leave it to him—for the present, I mean?"

"Yes; subject, of course, to such additions and corrections as I may choose to make to his plan."

"He has used that word strategy over and over again. What do you suppose he means by it?"

"He means that it would be fatal to the life and happiness of Rose if we should make an open attempt to follow her captors; but he also means that it may be done by stealth, so that they may suppose we are heeding their warning, while in reality we will not do so."

"I understand now."

"Remember, he knows Guerrero and the Guerrerans."

"Oh, I remember it all right. But I am impatient to be doing something. It seems almost criminal to me to be sitting here calmly talking with you when my sister and my sweetheart are both in the saddle, somewhere out there toward the mountains, being carried away by a horde of ruffians into captivity."

"And yet there is nothing that we can do now to avoid it."

"I know it. I know it only too well."

"It is dark now. It is near midnight. When I leaped from the doorway into the yard, I saw at least a score of men on horseback at the gate, and Primitivo says that there can be no less than fifty in the entire party. They would fight, too, Hal."

"I don't doubt it. I have always heard that Guerrerans were fighters."

"If we undertook to pursue them directly, it would require at least two companies of soldiers; and even they would stand but little show against those men. Nothing short of the Rurales can cope against them."

"Well, we could get Rurales, couldn't we?"

"Yes; by asking for them. But I agree with Primitivo, that some sort of strategy will be the better way."

"But what sort? What will you do?"

"I think, Hal, that Primitivo will go with me into Guerrero in disguise."

"And I? What shall I be doing in the meantime?"

"You will have to remain behind, Hal."

"I won't do it, and that's flat! I couldn't do it."

"I think, Hal, that you must do it. There will be no other way."

"But why can't I go with you, Nick?"

"There are many reasons. If we go into Guerrero in disguise, we will have to pass ourselves off as natives. Primitivo is a native, and in disguising him I will merely have to so alter his features that he will not be recognized by those who know him by sight."

"And yourself?"

"I will stain my face and neck and arms and chest; my feet, also, in case I should have to remove my footgear. I will dye my hair a coal black, and resort to other measures to carry out the deception."

"Why not I, also?"

"There are many reasons. You are much too tall, for one thing. Your eyes are too light a blue to go well with a stained face. They would give you away. Again, in Guerrero there is not much Spanish spoken. They have a language of their own."

"And do you speak it?"

"Perfectly."

"A knowledge of Spanish would not suffice in that country, eh?"

"Not at all, Hal; believe me."

"But I will perish with anxiety if you leave me behind."

"No; you will care for your father, and——"

"He has some one else to care for him now, Nick."

"Well, then, care for them both. They will need you. Besides, they are to be married on Wednesday. Neither of them wishes to postpone that event. It is fitting that you should remain with them, particularly when you know that your presence would be a hindrance to Primitivo and me rather than an aid."

There was a tap at the door at that moment, and Primitivo entered.

"I have decided, señor," he said, "of course, subject to your approval."

"Let us hear about it, my friend," replied the detective.

"Don Enrique cannot accompany us, señor."

"No; that is already decided."

"You will make me up in disguise, with that magic skill of yours, señor, so that those who know my face well will not recognize it if it should be seen?"

"Certainly."

"And yourself—you will also become a Guerreran? You speak the language so perfectly."

"Yes."

"Then see if you approve of what I have thought out."

"Well?"

"In the morning, early, we will go into the city together. We will procure what is necessary, and then we will go to the house of a friend of mine, where we will disguise ourselves. The house has a connection with another house on another street, and we will pass out of it by that way. Is it good thus far?"

"Splendid, Primitivo. Go on."

"From there we will go to an hotel, where we will remain several days, as if we were seeing the sights of the city. We will take false names, and we will mix with people long enough so that we will be generally thought to be native Guerrerans who are here for an outing."

"Yes."

"When we think the time is ripe for it we will start; but not before we are sure that no suspicion is attached to us; not until we are positive that we are not watched."

"Yes. What, then?"

"Then we will take the railroad for Chilpancingo, in Guerrero, and there again we must not be in haste. It will not do."

"I understand."

"When we feel perfectly assured that we may proceed with our plans, we will start out on our real errand—from Chilpancingo."

"That is all right, Primitivo; but have you any idea where we will go from Chilpancingo?"

"A very correct one, I think."

"Where is it?"

"To the hacienda of my cousin, Tranquilino. He is one of the richest men in the state, and the headquarters would be not far from his hacienda."

"I shouldn't wonder if you are right about that."

"I am sure of it."

"I only see one apparent fault in your plan, Primitivo," said the detective.

"What's that, señor?"

"If the 'Patriots' have left spies behind them to watch what we do, it will not take them long to discover that we are missing from the city, and, knowing that, they will naturally make a very good guess as to what we are doing."

"Ah; but I will be here, in bed, with the wound I received. That is, it must be supposed I am. The young señor must attend to that. It must be supposed that I am ill unto death in one of the rooms of this house, and the señor must see that I, apparently, receive the very best of attention. It can be easily done if he is careful."

"Yes," said Hal, delighted to have something to do. "I can carry out that part of it all right."

"And I," said Nick, smiling. "What have you thought out for me?"

"That the chief of police in the city, who is your good friend, would lend you a man whom you could fix to look so like yourself that the deception would not be discovered while he was on his way out here from the headquarters in the city; and after that—well, he would remain closely inside the house, being seen only infrequently in the garden and about the croquet-ground, and at the windows."

"I declare, Primitivo, you have thought it out in rather good shape. I see only one thing that you have forgotten."

"What is that, señor?"

"That you will be seen by somebody while on your way into the city with me in the morning, and it will be known that you are not wounded."

"I have thought of that also. I shall leave here at once, within five minutes. I shall go on foot across the *campaña* to the city, arriving there before daylight. I will go to the home of my friend and wait there for you, having given you the address where to find it. And for the rest—for what you will do when you leave here in the morning—you know best how to arrange that yourself."

"Primitivo, you have forgotten nothing. You have planned well. I think we will fool them splendidly."

"I am sure of it, señor."

"I will go to the chief and borrow a man as you suggest. I will trade indentities with him and send him out here, and a little after that I shall leave the chief and make my purchases. That done, I go to you, and then we can do the making up as Guerrerans."

"*Si, señor.* Then I will go at once. The address is on that slip of paper."

Primitivo turned away and was gone from the room at once.

"He is an invaluable man, Nick," said Hal Chittenden, after a moment.

"I have always found him so," was the reply.

"And I feel that you will succeed."

"We are bound to do so, Hal. Bound to do it."

CHAPTER VI.

NICK CARTER TO THE RESCUE.

When the detective started for the city the following morning, Hal Chittenden went with him to the station. While they awaited the arrival of the cars, he said to the detective:

"I have been thinking over that plan as it was outlined by Primitivo last night, Nick, and there is one thing in connection with it that rather sticks in my crop."

"What is that, Hal?"

"The time that it promises to take. The waiting here will seem interminable. First you have got to spend some time here in the city; then when you arrive in Chilpancingo you must do the same."

"Yes. But it is all necessary. You must keep in mind the fact that as long as we make no real move against those men, your sister and Eulalia are perfectly safe. No harm will come to them."

"All that sounds very well, but it is hard to believe, just the same. To my way of thinking, the girls are in danger every minute of the time they are in the power of those devils."

"Good-by, Hal," Nick called from the platform of the car, and he was whirled away toward the city.

He found the chief in his office, and speedily made him acquainted with what he wanted, with the result that several men were brought into the room, one after another, until the detective found one that would answer his purposes. Then the chief said to him:

"Corona, you will consider yourself from this moment under the orders of Señor Carter, until you are specifically released from it. You will receive his commands exactly as if they were given by me in person. Whatever he tells you to do, do it. Is it sufficient?"

"Si, señor."

Nick first changed clothing with Corona throughout. Then he made up his face as he wanted it, instructing Corona as he did so how to touch it up once in the while in order to maintain the deception. And after the man was fixed to his satisfaction, he put a few touches to his own appearance, so that at a distance he would have passed very well for Corona himself.

He sent Corona out of the office first, with instructions to go straight to Coyocan, where Mr. Chittenden and the señora would be waiting to receive him, instructing him also that he must devote himself to the care of the imaginary Primitivo, supposed to be badly wounded, and lying at the house.

Half an hour later he thanked the chief and bade him good-by, and was soon engaged in making the necessary purchases for the intended trip.

A little past noon he went to the address that Primitivo had given him, where the door was opened even before he could touch it, so closely had the Guerreran been watching for him.

Three hours later the two—Primitivo and Nick—left the house by the method already indicated, and by devious ways through several streets, finally arrived at the Iturbide hotel, and secured rooms there.

After that they devoted themselves to an apparent effort to have a good time, and they did everything in their power to allay any possible suspicion of them that might arise if they were watched.

Three days were passed in this manner, and then, feeling that they were secure, they took train for Chilpancingo, which is the capital of the state of Guerrero.

When they arrived there, another considerable wait had to be undergone, for it would not have done at all for them to start out at once for the interior.

They pretended that they were from a distant part of the state and had never visited the capital before; also that it was their intention to return to their homes on horseback if it were possible to purchase four good horses, two for their immediate use, and two others to carry their packs.

These packs really contained, among other things, extra saddles, and articles to make the two young women comfortable when they should be rescued.

And at last the time came for them to set out upon the last part of their journey toward the hacienda of Tranquilino Morales.

It was a journey of rather more than two hundred miles, Primitivo told the detective, but distances do not go for much in that country, where a horseback journey of a thousand miles is thought little of.

They did not hasten after they left the city of Chilpancingo. Haste at that time was not to be thought of, and it was necessary that they should attach no suspicion whatever to themselves in that country where it is the second nature of a man to be suspicious of his neighbor.

They stopped one night at a hacienda which was about half-way to the end of their journey, and, as they approached it, Primitivo said to Nick:

"I know the man who lives here. I used to know him well when we were both younger, but it would be doubtful if he remembered me even if I were not disguised. But he is a man from whom it should be easy to obtain some information. I remember that four years ago, señor, I instructed you about the secret signs among the bandits. Do you remember them?"

"Yes. Perfectly. I never forget such things."

"Then here is a man who will recognize them and answer them. He will ask you your name, where you are from, and who is your immediate chief, and you must have your answers prepared and ready so that there will be no hesitation in giving them."

"Very well. I will know what to say."

"Perhaps he will ask you what your business in these parts is, and it would not be a bad idea to reply that you are in the service of the queen. He will believe then that you are in the secret that but few know as yet. You can depend upon that."

"Suppose he is one who does not know it?"

"It is impossible to suppose that, since he is one who would have been consulted in the very beginning. I am not sure that my cousin would not actually have gone to him first about it."

"Then I will try and see what information I can pull out of him."

"You can perhaps find out by careful questioning if Eulalia is at the hacienda of Tranquilino, or if she has been taken elsewhere."

"Then it would be well to give him the impression that we are on our way to find her, on an errand from our chief; eh?"

"I think so."

"Where shall I say that we are from?"

"Tell him that we are from San Luis, which is on the other side of the mountains from here—on the coast side, and not easily accessible. It will be weeks before they will get the news there that the queen has been brought to headquarters."

"And what shall I give as the name of our immediate chief? Do you know who is the chief in San Luis?"

"Yes. Bernal Ochoa, always referred to as Don Bernal."

"And what is the name of this haciendero here?"

"Domingo Rocha."

When they rode up to the house and dismounted, an Indian came forward to care for their horses, and they were ushered into the house, and to the presence of the haciendero by another.

Don Domingo rose to receive them as they entered, and came forward with the usual salutation, which tells you that his house is yours with all that it contains.

Primitivo, who still maintained the rôle of servant, withdrew at once, as soon as his master was disposed of, taking with him a few sharp orders concerning the care of the horses which Nick fired after him as he departed; and then as Nick turned about, he made several of the secret signs of the bandits of Guerrero, and instantly Don Domingo came forward with extended hand, and embraced him.

"Your name, señor?" he asked at once, and Nick told him the name he had elected to make use of on that trip.

"And you are from—where, señor?"

"San Luis, señor. Over the mountains near the coast. It is a hard journey from there to find our queen."

"Ah!" Don Domingo rubbed his hands together in delight. "And so you are of the few who know about it," he questioned.

"Our chief, Don Bernal, has sent me with his felicitations, señor," was the instant reply from Nick. "But now I am at fault. I do not know where to look for our new queen."

"Did not Don Bernal tell you that, also?"

"Only to inquire at the hacienda of Don Tranquilino Morales."

"Well"—with a smile—"is not that sufficient?"

"I suppose so, señor. But are we near to it, pray? The country around here is new to me."

"You have yet a hundred miles to travel, señor. Then you will be there. I can supply you with a guide part of the way, if you require it."

"Thank you, but no. It will not be necessary. If you will give me the general directions that will be all I require."

"You should travel as nearly as possible due east from here, following the trails as they wind."

"Then there will be no difficulty. But tell me, Don Domingo, have you seen the queen?"

"No; nor will you, señor."

"Why not?" asked Nick, startled in spite of himself.

"Because she is not to be seen until we are all assembled together to greet her, and that time will be two months hence. It will take that long to get word to all

who should be on hand, and for them to arrive for the coronation."

"And in the meantime, Don Domingo, who cares for her?"

"The wife and the daughters of Don Tranquilino."

"Is she beautiful? We were told that she is so."

"She is more than beautiful—and young, señor."

"Ah!"

"After a while, when she has worn the crown alone for a time, she will begin to look about her for a husband; but it is understood among us that she cannot marry except with the advice and consent of the Board of Chiefs. In fact, it is already pretty well settled who will be her husband."

"Indeed! You amaze me. May I ask who?"

"The son of Don Tranquilino, who bears the same name as his father. What could be a better match than that? It is the same blood. They are both descended from the De Sotos."

"It is most excellent, I should say."

"But there is another, señor. Perhaps you have not heard."

"Another what? Not another queen. There could not be two."

Don Domingo laughed heartily.

"Not another queen in fact, but another queen of beauty," he replied, after a pause. "She is a young Englishwoman, who will also be kept out of sight until the day of coronation."

"Ah! And beautiful, you say?"

"Yes. With hair like spun gold, with eyes like the sky—so I have heard. I, who am a widower, am anxious to see her, señor."

"I do not doubt it. Is a husband also to be selected for her?"

"Such is the talk; but it is not known definitely what will be done in her case as yet. At present she is a sort of hostage, I believe. I do not entirely understand it, but doubtless Don Tranquilino will explain it all to you in the message he will return to your chief."

"Doubtless," said Nick, with a grim smile.

CHAPTER VII.

AN ATTACK WITH LASSOS.

All this conversation between Don Domingo and the detective, as recorded, was carried on in the Spanish language, but suddenly the host switched off without warning into the Guerreran, and had it not been that Nick Carter spoke it perfectly, he must have been unmasked then and there.

Even as it was, the don must have perceived some shortcoming in the detective's pronunciation, for he said:

"You are not a native Guerreran, señor, are you?"

"I was born and raised out of the state, señor," replied the detective; and thus he believed that he had allayed any suspicions which might have arisen in the mind of the don. Presently he asked another tentative question. It was:

"I trust that Don Tranquilino has kept with him a sufficient guard to protect the queen from all harm if danger should arise."

"You may be sure of that, señor," responded the don, with his wolfish smile.

It was not long after that when the detective retired to the room that was assigned to him, Primitivo occupying a petate on the floor beside the bed, for not only was it necessary that Primitivo should carry out to the full his position as servant, but in reality the old Guerreran preferred the petate and the floor to the softest of beds.

In the morning they were speeded on their way with many words of cheer, and with many complimentary phrases, but all the same there was a certain glint in the eyes of the host which gave Nick a sense of uneasiness he could not overcome. The result of it was that he was unusually silent as they rode onward together, he and Primitivo.

"Will you tell me what you discovered, señor?" asked Primitivo, at last, for he could no longer restrain his impatience.

"I found," replied Nick, "that the señoritas are at the hacienda of Don Tranquilino, and that they are to be kept in seclusion, under strict guard, for two months, or until such time as the chiefs can be called from different parts of the state to assist at the coronation. I discovered also that they are well guarded; also that it is the intention of Don Tranquilino that the 'queen' shall marry his son of the same name as his own; and also that it is generally understood that Señorita Chittenden is to remain with the queen indefinitely."

"It is about as I supposed it would be," was Primitivo's comment.

"I think," said the detective, after a pause, "that Don Domingo was suspicious of us."

"You do? Why?"

"I could not give you a good reason. I think I sensed it rather than thought it."

"Did anything occur to make him suspicious?"

"No; only something in my pronunciation of the Guerreran language."

"Did he ask you about it, señor?"

"Yes."

"And what did you tell him?"

"That I was born and raised out of the state."

Primitivo was thoughtful for a time. Then he asked:

"Did you give him to understand that we came from San Luis, over the mountains?"

"Yes."

"And mention the name of Don Bernal?"

"Yes."

"Did you ask him to give you directions for the remainder of the journey?"

"Yes."

"And what did he say? How did he direct you?"

"To travel as nearly as possible due east from here, following the trail as it winds."

Primitivo smiled grimly.

"You are right," he said. "Don Domingo was suspicious, for he has given you the longest way around to follow; and there could be but one reason why he should do that."

"Do you mean that he intends to get a messenger to Don Tranquilino before we can arrive there?"

"Yes."

"One who will carry with him any suspicions that the don may feel."

"Yes. And, señor, we must not permit that messenger to arrive. The entire success of our expedition may depend upon that."

"I think you are right, Primitivo. But how are we to head him off?"

"By riding forward on the trail he directed you to take until we are well away from the buildings of the hacienda, and then by cutting across into the shorter trail, and so intercepting the messenger he will send."

"Do you think it can be done?"

"It must, therefore it can be done."

"Unless he starts the messenger out so soon after us that he will have passed the spot where we would intercept him before we can get there."

"Trust me, señor. I know these mountains and the trails through them as perfectly as you know the streets of your native city. There will be time. He will wait an hour, at least, after our departure before sending out the messenger."

"I have an idea," said Nick.

"What is it, señor?"

"That Don Domingo will be his own messenger."

"It is not unlikely; only in that case he will not go alone. Señor, may I ask have you forgotten how to throw a rope, or can you do it as well as you used to?"

"I think I am quite as expert as ever, Primitivo."

"It is well. If Don Domingo should undertake to become his own messenger, he will take one of his men with him, therefore there will be two instead of one for us to attack and capture—for I suppose you will not consent that they be killed?"

"Certainly not!"

"It would be the safest way, señor," said Primitivo insinuatingly.

"It must not be. Say no more about it. We must capture them and dispose of them in some manner so that they will not be able to interfere with us, but they may not be injured, unless in a fair fight. And we wish to avoid a fight."

"Yes, señor."

"I will not have the don injured if it can be avoided, Primitivo. We have eaten his bread and otherwise partaken of his hospitality."

"And he has assisted in abducting my niece and your friend—and he would not hesitate to kill you if he suspected you."

"The positions are different. Anyhow, they must be captured, if possible. We will use the lassos. You will take one of them and I the other. We can do it."

"They must not be allowed to escape, señor, even if bullets have to be used to prevent: the lives of Eulalia and the señorita depend upon that!"

"I know."

It was not long before they left the buildings of the hacienda out of their sight around a spur of the mountains, and, after riding a couple of miles farther, Primitivo suddenly turned his horse to the right through a narrow ravine, and said:

"This will take us across to the other trail. And now, señor, we must ride fast, notwithstanding the roughness

of the trail we follow. Just before we arrive at the other trail, we must stop and fasten our extra horses somewhere, so their presence will not annoy us. Later, we must leave our own horses and go forward on foot."

That ride through the narrow and rocky ravine Nick Carter will never forget, for the exceeding roughness of it, together with the headlong speed they were obliged to use in traveling, rendered it a precarious part of their journey.

At last Primitivo checked his horse, and, dismounting, fastened the extra horses to scrubs that grew along the sides of the ravine, after which he leaped into the saddle again and led the way onward for another half-mile.

Then again he dismounted, and the saddle-horses were tied securely and left, while the detective and his guide went forward on foot.

It was not long before they came to the trail through which Primitivo said the don must pass, or if not the don, then some messenger sent by him; and he selected a spot where it was wider than in other places, and, having stationed Nick where he had elbow room for the use of his rope, he crossed to the opposite side of the trail himself.

Before going, Nick said to him:

"In order that there may be no mistake, Primitivo, by which we should cast our ropes at the same man, you will take the one who rides in advance, and I the one who rides behind. If they should by chance ride side by side, you will take the nearest to you—and we will both make the cast when the foremost of them gets abreast of that white rock. Is that understood?"

"Perfectly."

"The horses! Do you think there is any possibility that they will get away from us and make their way back to the hacienda?"

"No. If they get away, we must go after them and catch them, that is all. But I do not believe they will run off. Hark! We were none to early, señor."

"It is true."

Primitivo sped across the trail to his place of concealment, for in the distance they could hear the sound of approaching hoof-beats; and presently from behind the rock where Nick Carter was hidden, he could see two horsemen approaching at a brisk canter along the trail.

As the detective had anticipated, the foremost of the two men was the don himself, and behind him rode one of his vaqueros, a heavily built, dark-skinned man, who sat his horse like a Centaur.

The two were entirely unsuspicious of the ambuscade awaiting them, and they rode forward without a glance to the right or the left, but with their gaze fixed upon the trail before them, already anticipating the end of the run across the mountains to the hacienda of Don Tranquilino.

They rode at a distance of about twenty feet apart, the don leading the way.

As they approached the white rock that Nick had indicated, he rose to his feet in his place of concealment, and held his loop ready for the throw.

So perfectly did Nick and Primitivo work together, so well did they understand the plan they had formed, that the two loops left their hands simultaneously, whirred through the air, and dropped, true to the skilled hands that cast them, over the head and shoulders of each of the Guerrerans.

Too late the don heard the hiss of the riatas; too late he attempted to dodge the fatal loop, for there is no weapon so deadly for the one who attempts to fight against it, once it has fallen into place.

And these two did fall unerringly into place, over the heads and shoulders of the two men, pinioning their arms to their sides so that they could not use them—and the next instant two violent jerks dragged both riders from their saddles to the rocky floor of the trail, and Nick and Primitivo, still clinging to the ropes with one hand each, raised their guns and covered with deadly aim the men who had fallen into their power.

It was all over in a moment, that attack, and the don and his man, who followed him, were prisoners.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRISONERS IN THE MOUNTAIN HUT.

Nick Carter held the ends of both ropes and kept the two men covered while Primitivo securely bound them, and when that was done, he pursued and caught the two horses the don and his follower had been riding.

All this time not a word had been spoken between captors and captives; but when Primitivo returned with the captured horses and directed them to mount, the don could restrain himself no longer.

"So," he said to Nick, fixing his eyes upon the detective with a baleful glare, "I was correct in my suspicions, after all. And you knew that I did suspect you, eh?"

"Yes," replied Nick. "I thought so. You made a mistake, Don Domingo, when you asked me about my place of birth. You gave yourself away then. You should have held your tongue."

"And these trails through the mountains you know as well as I."

"The fact that we are here to intercept you is sufficient proof of our knowledge."

"You are both traitors. One of you, at least, is a Guerreran. That man there."

The detective shrugged his shoulders and made no reply, and at the same moment Primitivo disappeared into the ravine to secure and bring forward their own horses.

"Why are you here, señor?" the don asked, when he was securely in his saddle, with his ankles fastened one to the other, beneath the horse's belly and with his hands tied together behind him; the other man had already been served in the same manner. "Why are you here? What is the purpose of your expedition?"

"Can you ask?" said Nick, smiling.

"I do ask, señor. We have a right to elect our queen, and as she belongs to us, we also have the right to take her and bring her here, wherever we find her."

"Even if that were true, Don Domingo, does it give you the right to take a young Englishwoman and carry her into captivity, with threats against her life and honor?"

"No," admitted the don. "I grant you that. It was a foolish thing to do."

"Very."

"Señor, if it is only for the English girl you have come, if you will release me and permit me to ride forward with you, I will give my word that she shall be restored to you, and that you shall have safe conduct out of the state."

The detective laughed in his face.

"Don Domingo," he said, "do you suppose I would take your word for that? And even if you were sincere, and intended to live up to it, you know perfectly well that you would not be permitted to do so. Don Tranquilino is your superior. He would not permit the English girl to go, and you know it."

"I could prevail upon him, señor."

"No more than you could prevail upon the wind to stop blowing, or the earthquake to stop its trembling, señor. Believe me; I know. But to save yourself further argument, I will tell you now that we have come after the queen, as you call her, as well as her friend."

"Ah! You have?"

"Yes."

"You can never get her out of the state."

"We can try; and we can leave a trail of dead men behind us if we are pursued too closely, Don Domingo. We did not come here to joke with you. We are not playing at a game. We are in deadly earnest."

"Who are you, señor?"

"I? I am the friend of Eulalia Montez, and of Rose Chittenden."

"What do you intend to do with us? Kill us, I suppose?"

"Hardly that, unless you make it necessary."

"What, then?"

"Primitivo will answer that question when he arrives."

"Who?"

"Primitivo. My man."

"Ah!" cried the don. "I understand now. The man is Primitivo de Soto."

"You are a good guesser," said the detective, smiling.

"His life shall pay for this. He is a traitor."

Primitivo himself rode up and joined them at that moment, and the don turned to him.

"So you are Primitivo de Soto?" he exclaimed. "Our rightful leader, who has refused to have anything more to do with us."

"I am," replied the Guerreran simply.

"And you are a traitor."

"No. I am a true patriot. It is you and your friends who make up the traitors, Don Domingo. You are not wise enough to see that the cause you uphold can never succeed. If there was any chance in the world that Guerrero could be free, could be made an independent country by itself, do you suppose I would hesitate, particularly when I know that you would make me the ruler over you? But such a step—such a step as you are contemplating now can only end in death or imprisonment for all who are concerned in it. You know President Diaz and what he will do to you, as well as I do. And do you suppose, Don Domingo, that I will permit my

niece to become one with you, when I see ahead of her if she does so, nothing but a bullet, or, at the least, a prison for the rest of her life? She is too young, too beautiful, to be accorded such a fate."

"Your own life shall pay for this, Don Primitivo de Soto."

Primitivo shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"My life has been threatened too many times to let your words have any effect upon me," he replied. "There have been prices put upon it many times, but I still live."

"I swear——"

"Don Domingo," Primitivo interrupted him, "before you complete what you are about to say, let me advise you to keep a civil tongue in your head, or you may not live to arrive at the place where we are taking you."

"Where is that?"

"You shall see in good time."

They rode forward after that, Primitivo leading the way, and with the horses of the don and his man following along closely behind. After them rode Nick, and behind him came the two extra animals they had brought with them.

There were still about eighty miles to travel before they would arrive at the hacienda of Don Tranquilino, and there had to be a stop made before they got there, in order to dispose of the prisoners, and leave them safely until they should be released.

It was half-past four o'clock that afternoon when Primitivo turned off the trail and guided his horse up a steep and narrow path through a small ravine that opened out upon the trail, and for almost an hour they followed this way, arriving at last at what appeared to be a cul-de-sac. But another and still narrower ravine branched off from this, and presently they came out upon a sheltered valley in the very center of which was a small building of stone.

"You did not know of this place, did you, Don Domingo?" asked Primitivo, as he dismounted.

"No. I confess I did not. I believed that I was familiar with every inch of the country around here, but I never saw this place before."

"It used to be a storehouse for supplies; now it shall be your prison, señor."

"You intend to leave us here?"

"Yes."

"To starve, or to die of thirst? It will be better to shoot us at once."

"Neither the one nor the other, señor. You shall see."

The door of the stone house—there was no window—was opened with difficulty, it had been closed so long a time, and when opened it disclosed a perfectly dry interior, in which there still remained evidences that it had once been used as a storehouse, although there was nothing there now that was edible, of course.

The don and his man were taken from their horses and led inside the building, and there their ankles were bound securely, and they were seated upon the floor, which was of solid rock—a flat rock of the mountain itself; not a made floor.

Then Primitivo brought from the packs of their two led horses all the food that he and Nick had brought with them, and he filled half a dozen gourds that were there, and also a deep hollow place in the floor, with water that he brought from a spring near-by.

"Now, Don Domingo," he said, "we will leave you. When we are gone, you and your servant may amuse yourselves in untying the ropes about your ankles. It will take you some time to accomplish it, for I have drawn the knots hard and tight.

"When that is done, you may help yourselves to the food and water that is over in that corner. There is sufficient there to last you several days—perhaps ten, if you are sparing of it, and by that time, if we do not return this way to liberate you ourselves, we will have directed somebody to come and do it for us.

"I have taken from you both every article which would serve as a weapon, or to aid you in breaking out of this palace, so I have no doubt that you will remain until you are liberated. Do you understand that?"

"I do. It is plain enough."

"The door you cannot hope to break down. It was built to withstand attack from the outside, and will do so quite as well from the inside. My only advice to you is to be sparing of your food and water, for there is no telling how long we may be. Here is a bunch of coca-leaves, which I will also leave, in case you have to wait too long. *Adios.*"

Nick assisted him in fastening the door securely on the outside, until they were satisfied that there was no earthly chance that the men could escape; and then they mounted the horses again.

"Shall we leave the horses of the don somewhere near here?" asked Primitivo.

"By no means," replied the detective. "They may prove invaluable to us. We will take them along. Six horses are better than four. It provides us with two extras if we are hard pressed at any time."

"You are right, señor."

"How far have we to ride now before we arrive at the hacienda, Primitivo?"

"Forty miles. Our horses, although tired, can do it if we stop at sundown and rest them an hour or two."

"Then we should arrive there somewhere about midnight?"

"I think so. I hope so, señor."

"You are familiar with the lay of the land around the hacienda?"

"Perfectly."

"But we have no food, and, for one, I am hungry already."

"I saved enough out of the supply for a luncheon for us, señor."

"Good."

"I have only one regret, señor."

"What is that?"

"Our horses will be tired out, and for that reason we must not attempt the rescue this night. We must lie by all day to-morrow, in order to give them a chance to rest up. To do otherwise would be fatal to our plans."

"And is there a place near the hacienda where we can conceal ourselves and our horses with safety?"

"Yes, señor; an excellent place."

CHAPTER IX.

THE RAID ON THE HACIENDA.

"Primitivo," said the detective, shortly after one o'clock that night, "I am going forward to do a little reconnoitering. There is no time like the present, to my way of thinking. We will use what remains of this night to familiarize ourselves thoroughly with our surroundings, and to lay our plans for what is to follow."

"*Si, señor.* As you will," was the reply.

They had arrived at their journey's end; that is, so much of their journey.

Before them and beneath them, bathed in starlight, lay the many buildings of the hacienda of Don Tranquilino Morales. Behind them the mountains reared their peaks to lofty heights; and back there a little way, securely concealed, waited the six horses they had with them now. They had been fed and watered, and were now placidly munching the cool grass where they were picketed.

They made their way down toward the buildings with exceeding care, well knowing that there was ever imminent danger of discovery, and also that doubtless there were many dogs around the hacienda to give the alarm of their approach if they should be disturbed.

But fortune favored them.

They approached the buildings, by way of the corral, without interruption of any sort, and at last crept along the sides of one of them, where the vaqueros and the working men were housed.

There was a light in one end of this building, and noises proceeded from it, and creeping up closely they succeeded in peering in at a window, and so discovered that nearly the whole outfit of the place was engaged in a game of monte, which one of them had laid out for the others.

While he dealt the cards and paid or swept aside the bets that were made, he amused himself and the players by retailing the details of the trip he had just made to Mexico City, for it appeared, after Nick had listened a moment, that he was one of the men who had made the raid on the señora's house when the two girls were captured.

He had gotten as far as the relation of the presence there of Primitivo; he was saying:

"Old Primitivo de Soto was there, too. He was watching over the queen, who is his niece. I could easily have killed him, and perhaps I should have done so, but Don Tranquilino had given strict orders that it should not be. So I hit him with the stock of my carbine, and laid him out stiff, I tell you."

"And then——" asked one of the interested players, who had just won a large bet, and was grinning because of it.

"Then we made off with the señoritas. There was not a shot fired, or a noise made. The raid was wonderfully planned."

"Don Tranquilino is a wonderful man!"

"Surely. But I say, my friends, you should see the young Englishwoman! Ah, there is a beauty for your eyes."

"They say that her hair is like copper."

"Rather it is like gold, my friend; like spun gold. It is

a shame that she is to be restored to her people. She should be kept here."

"She is to be restored to her people, then?"

"So it is said; but it depends upon circumstances. If those people at Coyocan do not come after her, she will be returned to them."

The detective shut his fingers on Primitivo's arm as a signal that they had heard enough, and the two glided away again through the darkness and approached the house. But as soon as they were at a safe distance, Nick said:

"It looks to me as if every man on the place was in that room, Primitivo, gambling. We seem to have a clear field before us, don't you think so?"

"Yes. They do not dream of an attack of any sort. They do not think it necessary to be on guard, and now that the don has retired, they have begun their game of monte. It will last till daylight, or nearly that time."

"And do you think the house itself is unguarded?"

"There is not a doubt of it, with the exception of the *portero*. He would be at his post, but he is doubtless asleep."

"Can we get past him, do you think?"

"Easily."

"And once inside the house, do you know your way around?"

"Yes. I know the interior of the house quite as well as I do the mountain trails. It is two hundred years old. I have visited it many times when a boy, and played in every room it contains."

"Have you any idea where Eulalia and the señorita would be roomed?"

"I think I know exactly. Do you mean to seek them to-night?"

"Yes, I do. We may never again have so good a chance."

"But our horses, señor! They are not fit to travel."

"They will be sufficiently rested to take us back over the forty miles to the hut in the mountains where we left Don Domingo."

"True. I think they could do that; but it is off our route."

"So much the better. Can't we take to the mountains from there, and so leave no trail?"

"Yes; but there are the prisoners. What shall we do with them, señor? We cannot leave them there to starve."

"We can take them with us."

"True. I had not thought of that."

"Isn't there a route that we can take from there which will get us quickly out of the state?"

"Yes; we can cross the border into Oaxaca, at Tlapa. From there we can strike north and so enter the state of Puebla. The idea is a good one, señor."

"Then let us get them out to-night, if it is possible."

By this time they had arrived near the great front entrance to the house, behind which the *portero* was supposed to be sleeping; and now Primitivo glided forward alone, with the whispered words:

"I know exactly where he sleeps, señor. Let me do it. I can place my hand on him in the dark."

"All right, Primitivo; but no killing, mind."

"No, señor. I understand."

They passed through the small door cut into the big one, and which stood open as if to receive them, and Primitivo disappeared from view through an interior door, which opened upon a sort of cell at one side.

After a moment Nick heard the sound of a slight struggle, and then all was still again; and in another moment Primitivo returned to him.

"I have bound him and gagged him, and tied him to a ring in the wall, where sometimes a dog is kept chained," he explained. "He will not give any alarm. He is safe until he is discovered, which will not be till after daylight."

"Good. Lead on, now."

"I think," whispered Primitivo, "that the señoritas will be in the three rooms at the south end of the house. Perhaps they would have only two of them, but they are all together, and open one into another. There is danger that one of them will scream out when they first know of our approach, señor, don't you think so?"

"It is a chance that we must take. Lead on."

They ascended the four steps which led to the balcony that surrounded the court, or *patio*, and crept along it with great care, at last arriving in front of the door which Primitivo whispered was the one he sought.

The detective tried the handle of it very gently, but only to discover that it was locked on the inside; but the key had, fortunately, been left in the lock, and, having anticipated some such circumstance, Nick had brought with him his pair of burglar's forceps.

With these he had no difficulty in grasping the plunger

of the key, and turning it, and in another instant the bolt of the lock was shot back, and Nick Carter, closely followed by Primitivo, stepped into the room.

It was very dark in there, for the curtains had been drawn, and Nick waited a moment in the darkness to listen.

He could hear the gentle breathing of some sleeping person, and, first taking the precaution to close the door by which they had entered, he drew a wax *cerillo* from his pocket, and lighted it.

The blaze had no sooner flared up than they discovered that they were inside a room occupied by a man; and the man started up in bed, awakened by the light, at the same instant.

He opened his mouth to cry out, but no sound escaped him, for before he could utter it, Nick had dropped the still blazing *cerillo* to the floor and leaped forward, seizing the man by the throat, and so choking back the cry he would have uttered.

For a moment following upon that sudden attack there was a fierce struggle.

The man proved to be no mean antagonist. He was strong and wiry, and as agile as a flea.

But he was, nevertheless, no match for Nick Carter, who pulled him from the bed, dropped him upon the floor, and still choking him so that he could not cry out, whispered to Primitivo to lend a hand.

Primitivo did so by placing the point of his knife against the man's throat and whispering to him in the Guerreran tongue that if he uttered a sound or attempted in any way to give an alarm, that moment would be his last.

Nick bound his feet and hands, and then lighted another match, and with it a candle he discovered on one of the tables; and then as they looked at their captive, Primitivo permitted himself to smile broadly.

"It is Don Tranquilino himself," he said to Nick. "This is fortunate. We have horses enough. We will take him with us also—as a hostage;" and he added: "*Buenos noches*, Don Tranquilino. *Como esta, usted*, señor?"

"It is that voice of Primitivo de Soto that speaks to me," murmured the don, gazing with troubled eyes into Primitivo's face, which he did not recognize.

"Aye, and it is the tongue of Primitivo, also, that speaks," was the retort. "You did not think to see me here?"

"No."

"And did you suppose that you could carry my niece away into captivity, and that I would not pursue? Eh?"

"I did not know."

"Where is she, Tranquilino? She is here in this house."

"No; she has been taken away, Primitivo."

"You lie. Do you want this knife through your throat—now?"

"No."

"Then tell me what I ask. Where is she, and where is her friend and companion?"

"They are in the next room. The one that adjoins this one—over there."

Primitivo smiled.

"Señor Carter," he said, "you will find the young ladies in the room directly opposite that indicated by the don. I know him of old. He cannot speak truth. Also, in the room to which he directed us is probably sleeping his son, who would be awakened if you entered it."

"I think, in that case," replied Nick, "that I had better enter it at once, and serve him as we have served his father, lest he does awaken and give the alarm;" and he turned away quickly to carry out the idea.

CHAPTER X.

THE ESCAPE.

It was not long after that before the younger Tranquilino was lying on the floor beside his father in the middle room, and while Primitivo stood over them threateningly, warning them that the slightest sound would be a dangerous proceeding on their parts, Nick stepped boldly to the door of the other room and rapped upon it, knowing that the sound would not be heard save where he intended that it should be.

He was obliged to rap the second time before he received a response, and then he could hear some one spring from the bed inside the room and approach the door.

A moment later the voice of Eulalia asked in Spanish:

"What is wanted? Who is there?"

"It is Señor Carter," replied Nick, in the same language. "Be careful. Do not make a noise. Primitivo is here with me. We have come to take you back to your

friends. Waken Rose, and then both of you dress as quickly as possible. If you have scrapes, or wraps of any kind, bring them out with you, for we must get away from here as soon as possible."

"But the door is locked on your side," said Eulalia, after uttering several expressions of joy and delight at the news she received.

"All right," said Nick. "I'll get it open. Do as I have directed, and make haste."

He returned then to the captives on the floor.

"Don Tranquilino," he said sternly, "I will thank you for the key to that door."

"Yonder, on the table near the window," replied the don, who now saw plainly that resistance would be utterly useless.

Nick found it, placed it in the door, and turned it. Then he called out:

"The door is unlocked. You can come out when you are ready. Make haste."

Returning to the center of the room, he manufactured two gags out of the pillow-cases from the bed, and adjusted them with great care. Then, with still more care, he affixed additional bonds to the ankles and wrists of his captives, tying their hands securely behind, and doing it in a way that he knew was certain.

By the time this was attended to, the door between the rooms was thrown open, and Rose and Eulalia came out quickly.

Eulalia ran first to Nick, then to Primitivo; and Rose, when she attempted to speak, found that she could not, so, instead, she put her head on Nick's shoulder and sobbed.

"Oh," she whispered, at last, "I do so want to get away from this awful country. Think of all that I have been through since I have been here. And that man there"—she pointed toward the younger Tranquilino—"is terrible. I am afraid of him."

Before they left the room they carried the two captives into the one that had been occupied by the girls, and left them there. Then they came out and turned the key on the outside, whereupon Nick calmly put it in his pocket with the remark:

"Unless they possess a second key to that door, it will have to be broken down before the don and his son are liberated."

"You do not wish to take him with us, then?" asked Primitivo.

"Certainly not. Come, Eulalia. Come, Rose. Primitivo, you must go ahead and see that the coast is clear. Those gamblers may have left their game by this time."

But they had not. They were still at it, and the detective with his party passed in perfect safety the buildings of the hacienda, and were presently hurrying along the trail toward the mountainside where they had left the horses.

"Why not help ourselves to fresh horses and leave the tired ones here?" asked Nick, as they approached them; but Primitivo shook his head.

"It would be dangerous," he said. "We would startle somebody. The horses would give the alarm. The horses have had so many rests during the trip that I think they will make it all right. We have gotten along so finely thus far that I do not think there will be an alarm before daylight, and by that time we should be almost to the hut in the mountains where we left Don Domingo."

As they rode onward, later, Nick asked Rose about the treatment they had received.

"Save for the attentions of that young man," she replied, "I have nothing to complain of. But he was terrible."

"He fell in love with you, did he?"

"He pretended to do so. Ugh!"

"It was your golden hair and your blue eyes that drew him, Rose."

"He is a snake, that man. He is terrible. No matter what his father may have promised, *he* did not mean that either of us should ever get away from him. But can we escape even now?"

"I think so. I think there is no doubt of it. We have gotten this far, and surely we will not lose now, Rose."

"Heaven grant that we may not."

After a little Nick urged his horse beside the one that Eulalia was riding.

"Well, Eulalia," he asked, "how do you like being a queen?"

She laughed at the question.

"I don't like it," she replied. "I would rather be with those I love——" She stopped suddenly, and Nick could see her blush rosy red, even in the starlight. Then she inquired demurely:

"Why did not the young Señor Chittenden come with you?"

"Because we would not permit him to do so."

"Why?"

"He was too eager, for one thing. He is too big to be disguised as a Mexican, and he does not speak Guerreran."

"Oh!" she said, and was silent.

They could not push their horses to more than a very slow gait, and yet they covered the ground with considerable rapidity. Nevertheless, the sun was up and shining brightly when at last they rode into the little valley where they had left their two captives.

"Now, Primitivo," said the detective, "we have got to take the chances of spending the day here. The horses can go no farther until they have had at least twelve hours of rest."

"It is true, señor."

"What I wish to know is, can you lead us along the mountain trails after dark to-night?"

"Have I not already done it in the dark, señor?"

"But these other trails that we must follow now?"

"Yes, señor; or where there is no trail at all. In fact, señor, it is my intention to take you across the mountains by a route where there is no trail, and where we will leave none behind us. I know the way, and it is our surest method of getting away safely."

"Good, if you can do it."

"I can do it."

"Do you think we will be quite safe here through the day?"

"I think so. Even Don Domingo did not know of the existence of this place, and, while I believe that Tranquilino does know about it, it will not occur to him that we are here."

"It might."

"Well, even if it should, there is another way out than the one by which we came."

"There is?"

"Yes. Yonder."

"Then during the day, while we remain here, we must take turns in keeping watch, back on the trail by which we came."

And so it was agreed.

The door of the hut was opened, and the don and his man were again bound and made helpless. They were greatly surprised at the quick return of Nick Carter and Primitivo, but they shrugged their shoulders and accepted all that had happened as a decree of fate which they could not control.

With the food that had been left behind them breakfast was prepared and eaten, and altogether it was rather a merry party that assembled around the frugal repast.

Primitivo was, however, absent. He had eaten his breakfast, and departed down the trail to stand the first watch of the day.

At noon he returned, and the detective took his place. Nick had spent part of the time of waiting in giving the horses a thorough rubbing, and the rest of it in sleep; and now Primitivo also devoted himself for a time to the horses, after which he also took some needed rest.

At five o'clock Nick returned to the improvised camp, and Primitivo again went on watch, but he had been gone less than half an hour when he returned in great haste.

"They are coming," he said, "but they are still three miles or more away. I could not tell how many, but there are probably ten or a dozen of them, perhaps even more."

"There is one comfort, anyhow," said Nick, as they were throwing the saddles on their horses. "We will not have to take the don and his man along with us. We can leave them here now, where the others will find them."

And so the two men were left bound and lying upon the ground, where they would be seen at once when the pursuers arrived, and then Primitivo led them out of the valley by the route he had indicated.

It was a narrow and precipitous path, and difficult for the horses to climb; but they surmounted it at last by passing up through a narrow gorge with precipitous rocks on either side, where at some time rushing torrents of water had gouged it out.

At the very top of it there was a huge boulder, nicely balanced. It was just such a boulder as is sometimes called a "Rocking stone," and as they passed it, Primitivo dismounted.

"Here is another wise provision of my father's," he said. "If you will help me a moment, señor?"

"To do what?"

"To roll this boulder into the gorge. It will lodge there, and our pursuers will not be able to pass it."

"By Jove, Primitivo, is that so?"

"The señor will see presently."

They braced their shoulders against the rock, and by their united exertions it presently toppled over with a

great crash, and wedged itself solidly into the space between the walls of the gorge; and there it hung, leaving not sufficient space beneath it, or on either side, for a child to have passed.

"Now," said Primitivo, "we can take our time."

"Can they not go around it?" asked Nick.

"There is no way. To get upon our trail now they will have to travel twenty miles or more, and even then they might not find it. But they will guess that we are making for the Oaxacan border, and will try to cut us off."

"Then ought we not to take another route?"

"No, this one will be the safest. We must either get ahead of them, or fool them somewhere on the way. I think we can do it."

"Anyhow, we can save our horses all that is possible, and keep their strength for an emergency," said Nick.

"Yes. Ah, señor, do you hear that?"

There was shouting down the gorge behind them, and then they could hear the sounds of horses approaching up the steep path.

"Come," said Nick, "we need not wait here."

"No, señor."

"Then forward. We have a comparatively level road ahead of us now."

CHAPTER XI.

THE ENEMY GOT THERE FIRST.

Save for the fact that they stopped several times for breathing-spells, and to slake their thirst or take a bite to eat, they hurried onward all that day, and by nightfall had crossed the border of the state into Oaxaca.

Their way had been smooth and level since midday, for they had left the mountains and entered upon a stretch of table-land, where the traveling was as perfect as a macadamized road would have been.

Late in the afternoon they swung to the northward, directing their route toward Puebla, and also toward a point where they would find a railroad.

While their present route was much more pleasurable, there was always the difficulty that their pursuers would ride out on the level plain behind them, and see them, for one could see moving figures for twenty miles across that level stretch of table-land.

They camped for the night near a stream they crossed, and in the morning started on again even more briskly than before, now swinging rather to the westward again, for the point for which Primitivo was making was the terminus of the narrow gage road in Puebla; a place called Chiautla.

And it was Primitivo's idea, also, that, by taking the circuitous course he did, the pursuers would be better thrown off the trail, providing they had succeeded in finding it.

Throughout that second day they saw no sign of pursuit, and each of them began to think that they had entirely outwitted their pursuers.

Only Primitivo shook his head in doubt.

"I know Tranquilino," he said to Nick once. "He is like a bloodhound on a trail. Nothing can throw him off of one, and he will be tireless in our pursuit, to say nothing of that young devil of a son of his."

"When can we reach Chiautla?" asked Nick.

"Not before noon of to-morrow, at the earliest," replied the Guerreran.

"Do you suppose that Tranquilino will guess that we are making for that particular place, Primitivo?"

"That is what I fear. He will suppose that we are making for a railroad somewhere, as being our safest and surest method of getting out of the country, and he will by this time have sent at least three companies of men after us, each numbering at least a score. They will go in three directions, and you may be sure that one of them will make for Chiautla."

They camped again in the open, the second night out—or, rather, the third, counting the one of their escape—but as soon as it was daylight they were traveling onward again toward their goal—the railroad.

"We should make it by noon," said Primitivo, after they were well started.

"There seems to be no signs of pursuit behind us," replied Nick.

"That is not what I fear, señor."

"What, then?"

"That they have cut across and are already at Chiautla."

"Ought we not to have taken that shorter route?"

"No; we would have been overtaken on the way. That is why I have led you around as I have done."

"If they are there, Primitivo, when we get there, we will have to fight for it, eh?"

"I am afraid so."

"Aren't there Rurales in the town?"

"Possibly; but even so, most of them will be in sympathy with Tranquilino. He is a power throughout all this part of the country. They would be afraid to go against his word, and who are we that we should deny the spoken word of the great Don Tranquilino?"

"Isn't there a *jefa politico* there, at Chiautla?'

"To be sure."

"Would he not give us his aid, and the young ladies an asylum, until help can be summoned? Don't you think he would do that? I have still in my possession the authority of the chief of police, that he gave me long ago to represent him, and commanding all men, in his name, to render me assistance."

"The authority of the chief does not extend beyond the City of Mexico, save by courtesy, señor. Here they would not recognize it."

"Then possibly it would be best for you and the señoritas to stop somewhere outside the town while I go forward into it to discover if our pursuers are there."

"Or I. I should be the one to do that."

"No; I don't think so. But we will determine that when the moment arrives to do so."

"Si, señor."

"What are you two discussing?" asked Rose. "Is there still danger?"

"There is always danger, Rose, until we are well out of this part of the country."

"I feel as brave as a lion," she said, smiling into his eyes.

"And I, also," said Eulalia. "Señor Carter, if you will give us those weapons you took from Don Domingo and his servant, it would not be a bad idea, would it?"

"Indeed it would not. Here they are, Eulalia. I think you both know how to use them."

At eleven o'clock they halted, for they had reached a high point on the trail from which they could see the white and glistening walls of the houses of Chiautla, ten miles away.

"I think," said Nick, "that you had better wait here now, and let me ride into the town alone; and this is about as near to it as it is safe for you to go. Primitivo, you know so much about this country——"

"Not about this part of the country, señor. I was never much in Puebla, and we are in that state now."

"Then you could not suggest a place where you might conceal yourselves until I return?"

"No; not unless we select that church yonder. They might give us asylum there. There should be two or three padres around who might aid us."

"Go there, then, and I will ride on. After you have left the señoritas, and are certain that they are in good hands, do you ride out to this point again, and watch for my return. Will you do that?"

"Yes, señor."

"Your eyes are good. You will be able to see me quite plainly at a considerable distance, don't you think?"

"Nearly all the way to the town, señor. There is a rise of ground over in that direction. If you ride toward it, I will know that it is you."

"Rose," said Nick, "give me that red serape of yours. Good. Now, Primitivo, if you see me wave this, you will know that all is well, and you can ride forward with the young ladies. If I ride toward you and do not wave it, you will understand that all is not right."

The detective rode into the town of Chiautla, warily, a little more than an hour later.

In appearance, it will be remembered, he was like any Mexican, and he had no fear of being recognized for what he was, unless Tranquilino Morales or his son, or Don Domingo should happen to be there. Any one of them would know him at once.

He made his way directly to the railroad-station as being the most likely place to obtain the news he sought, but he dismounted and left his horse at some distance back, so that in case there was any trouble, he could easily secure him again.

When he approached the platform of the station, it was instantly apparent to him that something unusual was going on, for there was a crowd there, at least what would be termed a crowd in such a place.

And they were mostly Guerrerans; he could determine that at a glance, being rather taller than most Mexicans, and with a fiercer cast of countenance, bow-legged, and costumed after the *charro* fashion, with their huge, silver-trimmed sombreros they made a picturesque group.

There were so many persons there that he entered among them unnoticed, and he paused here and there as he made his way forward to listen to the low-toned conversations about him.

He was not long in discovering that they were aiming to intercept him and his friends if they should arrive by that route, and they had congregated at the station, knowing that the fugitives would go there at once to get a train out of that part of the country.

But he also heard enough to understand that these men were not at all sure that the fugitives would come that way. They had no knowledge of the route that he and Primitivo had taken from the mountains of Guerrera. It was merely one of the three parties that Primitivo had forecasted in his remarks, and there were others that had gone in different directions.

But there were ugly gleams in the eyes of these men, and the detective realized only too well that nothing, not even soldiery, would stop them, if once they discovered that their prey was near at hand.

Their leader he saw was a determined man, past middle age, probably one of the chiefs who had helped to elect the "queen," and therefore one who would be determined that she should not escape them, if it were possible to prevent such an event.

Satisfied as to the proximity of danger, the detective edged his way around until he was near the entrance to the station, and presently he passed inside, wondering if it would be possible to use the telegraph without the knowledge that he had done so getting to any of the men on the platform.

When he stepped to the window he was overjoyed to discover a pair of honest Irish eyes looking into his, and an Irish face behind it, with fiery red hair covering the head, and a lower jaw that suggested a bulldog.

"The very man of all others to help me out," was the detective's thought.

In the meantime the Irishman had stepped to the window, and in excellent Spanish he inquired:

"What can I do for you, señor?"

Nick glanced quickly around him before he replied, and then, perceiving that no one was near them, he adopted a perfect Irish brogue, as he replied:

"Whist, now, maybe I'm Irish like yerself; but for th' love of Hiven don't brathe a worrrrd iv it. It's a disguise I'm wearin', no less; and thim spalpeens out there are busy lookin' f'r me gore, so they are. Will ye be afther helpin' me, I wonder?"

For reply the Irishman stepped to the door of his little office and opened it.

"Come inside," he said; and then he closed down the window and drew the curtains at the others, so that they would be unobserved. Then he stretched out his hand.

"Will I help ye?" he repeated. "Sure I'll help ye, to the last drop of me blood. But what have ye been doin', I want to know. I was told that thim divils out there on the platform were after a party what stole away two women from an hacienda somewhere in Guerrero."

"So they are; no less; and I'm the man that stole 'em. But first they stole them away from their homes and took them prisoners into Guerrero; no less. Wan iv thim they want to make a quane of, because her mother was a Guerreran. She is half-Spanish. The other is an English girrul that's half-Irish, by the same token. Have ye got that down?"

"I have, me friend. Sure."

"The rest iv the parrty is out there, ten miles or more, at the top iv a hill where there is a church. The padre is lookin' afther thim till I git back."

"That is the church of San Sebastian. I know it."

"Sure I didn't stop to ask its name. I came on to see if the coast was clear. And now will ye help me, I want to know?"

"Sure I'll help ye. Didn't I say so? But how?"

"I'll show ye how mighty quick. What time does the next train leave for Puebla city?"

"There isn't another train now till to-morrow morning."

"Ye don't say! Then by the powers, I think I know what to do."

CHAPTER XII.

JUST A HAIRBREADTH ESCAPE.

"If you're thinkin'," said the operator, "that ye can wait out there at the church till it's time for the train, and then come in and take it, I'll tell ye right now that thim fellows outside will be here all the time. There won't be any chanct of that. They are to wait here till they're ordered away, and that won't be for two or three days."

"Sure, I've got a plan that bates that all hollow," replied Nick, still assuming the Irish brogue. It was a harmless deception, and it assured the loyalty of the operator and ticket-agent.

"What is it?"

Before he replied, Nick pulled a huge roll of bills from his pocket. He had supplied himself plentifully with money before his departure from the City of Mexico, not knowing how greatly in need of it he might find himself; and when the operator saw the size of the roll

his eyes bulged. Nick peeled off a fifty-dollar bill and handed it to him.

"That's for you for yer trouble," he said. "Whist, now, no worrrds! Take it. It's yours, and I've got many more like it. And now for the plan."

"Yes."

"First, I want ye to telegraph to the city of Puebla and ask thim there how much it will cost to send an engine and one car down here at once for a parrty iv four. Whin they answer that, tell thim that I have deposited the money with you for the price av it; and sure, as ye can see, there is enough here."

"Yes."

"Just explain to thim that it's a matter iv life an' death wid us; that the engine and car must come as soon as it can be got here. Will ye do that same?"

"I will."

"Tell thim that they are to stop five miles outside Chiautla, and not to come to the station at all, at all. Have you got that down?"

"I have, me friend."

"Tell thim that we are two men and two young women, and explain as much more to thim as ye like. Say that wan of the ladies has golden hair and blue eyes, and that the other is Spanish. Say that wan iv the men is an Irishman, disguised as a Mexican, and that the other is a Mexican all right. Say that I will have an order from you in me fist to give to the conductor in charge iv the train. Now is all that straight in y'r mind?"

"It is."

"Thin sure there's nothing more to be said. Suppose ye find out about it, and how much it will cost, while I sit here wid ye. Thin I'll l'ave the money in y'r hands for the pay. If I should draw the firrst leg iv a letter A from here to where I left the ladies, and the other leg iv it back again to the railroad track, it would hit it about five miles out, don't you think?"

"Yes."

"That'll be the ticket, then. As soon as I know about the special, and about what time it can get here, I'll hike back afther me fri'nds, and take 'em to the trrack. Now do y'r telegraphing."

For a considerable time after that the giant sounder of the telegraph instrument sent forth an incessant clicking; but at last the operator turned around with a smile on his unhandsome but thoroughly good face, and he said:

"It's all fixed. It'll cost you two hundred dollars. I tried to get it for less, but it couldn't be done."

"Sure, it's chape at twice the price."

"I tould them that ye would pay me and I'd give ye a recate for the money, which would be the ividence that ye were the right man. I described how ye look, and towld about the young ladies. They will stop five moiles out, and wait for ye."

"We'll be there by the time they are. How long will that be? Did they say?"

"Two hours. It's eighty moiles, an' forty an hour is about all they can make."

"Sure it'll take me that much time to git me fri'nds and bring thim to the track. And say!"

"Well?"

"We've got six horses out there. Two of them—blacks they are—don't belong to us, but the other four do, and y'r welcome to 'em, saddles an' all, if you'll accept 'em—and can catch thim afther we l'ave."

"Thank ye. I'll l'ave the office an' roide down the track to see ye off. Hiven speed ye, me friend."

But Nick was already out of the office, and in a few minutes more he was pounding across the plain toward the church of San Sebastian.

He did not wave the red serape until he was within two miles of the place, but then he did so; as he approached nearer, he saw Primitivo and the girls riding out toward him, and he turned off to the left, signaling to them to meet him on that course.

When they came together he explained what he had done; and then they hurried onward once more toward the railroad track at a point five miles east of Chiautla.

They were within three miles of the railway track when they saw the special train approaching from a distance, and Nick calculated the distance, figuring that they would arrive at the track at just the right moment.

Then Eulalia uttered an exclamation of alarm, and called out to him:

"Mr. Carter! Look there! Look toward the station!"

He did so, and he could see half a score of horsemen with others straggling along behind, riding at breakneck speed along the railway tracks toward them.

He realized on the instant that in some manner the Guerrerans had got wind of what was happening, or that they, too, had seen the smoke of the approaching train, and meant to meet it, suspecting that it had been

sent for, since there was no regular train due at that time.

At all events, there was danger in the air, and our friends spurred their horses forward at renewed speed, while Nick waved the red serape toward the approaching train.

He guided his horse, and so led the way for the others, so that they would exactly meet the train at an apex he selected with his eyes; then he looked again toward the approaching horsemen.

Far in advance of all of them was a single rider, and at first Nick thought him one of the Guerrerans; then he remembered that the operator had said he would come out to see them off.

"Get there if you have to kill the horses," he called out to his friends. "It is life or death for you, Eulalia, and you, Rose."

The Guerrerans had fresh horses, and those of Nick and his friends were spent. But they struggled on gallantly, for all that, as if they realized how much depended upon their speed and endurance.

But Nick could see that the Guerrerans were gaining with every stride, and that if the race were to last much longer they would win.

All the time he kept on waving the red serape, and at last a long whistle, followed by three short toots, told him the signal had been observed, and that the train would stop at the right point.

They rode down the last stretch of a quarter of a mile to the track, all four abreast. The operator from the station was just about even with them—that is, the same distance from the locomotive where it came to a stop, and forty rods behind him came the Guerrerans, yelling now like so many Indians.

The safety-valve of the engine was popping when at last they reached the track and leaped from their horses; and Nick grasped Rose by the hand, leaving it to Primitivo to do the same for Eulalia; then they ran forward, up the grade, and seized the guard-rail at the steps of the car just as the foremost of the pursuers began popping their guns at them.

They could hear the ping of the bullets against the end of the car, and the steel plates of the engine as they climbed aboard, but fortunately not one of the party was touched.

Nick was the last of his party to board the car, and as he did so he called out to the engineer:

"Full speed backward, and a ten-dollar bill for yours!"

Then he looked behind him and saw that the operator from Chiautla had also climbed aboard, having deserted his horse also.

"Faith, but it was a close shave," he gasped. "I'll ride with ye to the next station. If I went back there now, me life wouldn't be worth a brass farthing."

Nick dashed inside the car and called out:

"Down on the floor, flat! Both of you!"

And then a perfect storm of bullets rattled against the car, tore through the woodwork, shattered the windows, and hailed against the engine, which was now going backward at full speed.

In less time than it takes to tell it they were out of range, however, and looking back, Nick could see some of the Guerrerans shaking their fists impotently at the escaping engine and car. But the chase was over, and Nick and his friends had won.

They slowed down at the next station for the operator to drop off, and he bade them another heartfelt "good-by" before he did so.

The journey to Puebla, and from there to the City of Mexico, was made in safety and with as much expedition as possible. It was exactly fourteen days since he and Primitivo left there together to rescue the young women.

At Coyocan they found that the marriage ceremony between Mr. Chittenden and the señora had taken place as scheduled; and the entire party, Primitivo included, left the City of Mexico that night for the North.

On the train, as they were pulling out of the city, Hal Chittenden sought Nick, who was alone on the platform; and he said to him:

"I have done it, Nick, and I have won."

"Do you mean Eulalia?" asked the detective.

"Yes. We will be married as soon as we get to New York; and Primitivo has promised to remain with us as long as he lives. How is that?"

"Fine, Hal, fine! Where is Eulalia?"

"Here she is," said a tender voice behind him, and a pair of soft arms went around his neck as Eulalia whispered in his ear:

"We owe all our happiness to you, Señor Carter; all of us. Heaven bless you!"

THE END.

The next number (505) will contain "The Crystal Mystery; or, Nick Carter and the Magic Eye."

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TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

No longer is it necessary for any one suspected of concealing contraband goods to submit to the unpleasantness of a personal "search," for, owing to Professor Roentgen's discovery, every smuggler can now be made to disclose the property he is endeavoring to hide by the mere passing of an X-ray through his anatomy. This system has now been working for several months in New York, and is said to answer excellently. Of course, for such articles as textile fabrics, laces, etc., it is no good, but for all substances of a mineral nature the Roentgen ray is unerring in disclosing their whereabouts.

In connection with this new method of adding terrors to the crime of smuggling, the writer had an interesting conversation recently with an official high in the service of the United States Customs Bureau. This gentleman has been connected with the Customs office for many years, and he laughed at the suggestion that the smuggling of contraband goods into the States was dying out.

"Smuggling valuables into this country," he said, with an amused smile, "is just as popular to-day as it was twenty years ago. And what's more, I think it is now done more brazenly than formerly. The women, of course, are the worst offenders, for they rely on getting hold of a 'soft' official who will swallow their smiles and then take the most cursory glances at their possessions. Some of them are like that, too, for somehow it goes against the grain to tumble about the hundred and one things belonging to a pretty woman who keeps on begging you to be careful and not ruffle her finery.

"On many occasions, as you are probably well aware, it is necessary to search a man or woman whom we have good reason to suspect of concealing contraband goods. This, of course, is very unpleasant both for them and us, for frequently it turns out that we have made a mistake and the suspected party is perfectly innocent. When we do make such mistakes the supposed smuggler is, of course, very indignant, but all they can lay claim to is an ample apology, which is generally forthcoming.

"I believe soon there will be no necessity for any such searchings, for, owing to a happy thought on the part of one of the officials, we can now find out all we want to know by means of the X-ray machine. When we suspect any one we simply ask him or her into the Customs office, where the Roentgen-ray instrument is already in position. It only takes an instant to turn the ray upon them, and an instant longer to discover whether they are concealing dutiable goods. If we find that they are, then they are promptly told to 'unlimber'; if not, then they quietly retire without having been asked even to turn their pockets out.

"By means of this wonderful instrument we have already made many sensational 'finds.' The other day, for instance, a man was found to be wearing no fewer than twenty-seven watches, and, as that number seemed considerably in excess of his requirements, we were obliged to ask him for an explanation. All he could say was that they had been given to him, and he therefore considered they were not subject to duty, but he did not explain his eccentric manner of carrying them about with him. He was highly indignant when told that the timepieces would be 'held.'

"On another occasion we were obliged to treat to the X-ray a lady who we knew had in her possession a valuable collection of cut gems—uncut gems are allowed in the States free of duty. She asserted that she had nothing to declare, and after going carefully through her trunks we came to the conclusion that if she had any valuables they must be on her person. We asked her to kindly visit the private room of the Customs Bureau on the pier where she had landed in order to answer a few questions. We told her that she would not be subject to the indignity of a search, and she smiled happily. When she entered the office two officials held her in animated conversation, while a third treated her to a systematic search by means of the X-ray.

"Curiously enough, she was totally unconscious of the latter performance, as the operator sent the rays through her back. He failed to discover anything, and we were about to let her go, when it struck me that she was wearing very high heels to her shoes. I asked her to take a seat, and begged that she would let us have a peep at her feet. She smiled jauntily and thrust out two little tan-covered 'understandings' which were certainly pictures of grace. Then we turned the light onto them, and, alas! in the heels we found what we were looking for. She carried the matter off with a laugh, but her husband had to pay up pretty handsomely.

"It seems funny, perhaps, to say so, but we Customs officials always get suspicious of the man who wears a wooden leg. You see, for any one traveling constantly between here and Europe the fact of wearing an artificial leg is in itself a bit of a temptation. The victims know themselves that only the hardest-hearted official in the world would drop on the one-legged man and suspect him of turning his artificial appendage into a secret chamber, and so I believe that a good deal of smuggling may be put down to the man who wears a wooden leg. On more than one occasion, however, we have been compelled to ask a man who has unfortunately been obliged to wear a wooden leg to

unstrap that object of our suspicion and allow us to examine it. Sometimes we have found concealed goods therein and sometimes we have not. Anyway, I am glad to say that with the assistance of the Roentgen ray it will now be quite unnecessary for us to ask any gentleman to unstrap his leg, for we shall simply turn the light onto it and all its secrets will be revealed. Strange to say, we have not had a wooden-legged man under suspicion since adopting the Roentgen ray as a contraband detector.

"It has been suggested that we should use the Roentgen ray on trunks and all baggage, but I do not think this would be practical, though, if it could be done, it would save a great deal of trouble. There would be then no necessity for unlocking trunks, taking the half-dozen trays out, and tossing the things about. But, then, again, the ray, if thrown into a trunk, would not be sufficiently discriminative—it would show up both new and old articles, so that we would still have to examine them to find out whether they were dutiable. In the case of things concealed on the person we are pretty certain that they are dutiable or they would not be hidden in this way.

"A few weeks ago we discovered a string of pearls, 249 in number, and magnificently matched, round the waist of a young girl who is well known in New York society. I need scarcely say that they were not worn outside her clothing, but under her corset. We had reliable information that she had purchased the pearls in Paris, and that in all probability she would endeavor to smuggle them through, so on her arrival we kept our eyes well skinned. She came ashore very jauntily—so jauntily, in fact, that we became almost certain that she had the jewels on her. Her father was a very prominent man in New York, and so we did not wish to act too hastily. The young lady was called into the office to answer a few questions, and the X-ray was thrown upon her, revealing the double row of pearls that encircled her waist. Of course, she was much upset, but the father immediately gave a check for the amount of the duty, and the story did not leak out."

Robbers are tried and convicted by ballot in some parts of Japan. Whenever a robbery is committed, the ruler of the hamlet summons the entire male population and requests them to write on a slip of paper the name of the person they suspect as having committed the crime. The one receiving the largest number of votes is declared duly "elected," and is accordingly hanged.

This system, like all others, has its peculiar advantages. It insures the punishment of somebody for every robbery committed, whereas under the system in vogue in many civilized countries, in nine cases out of ten, no punishment is inflicted on anybody for the crime, and justice remains unsatisfied.

ACT I.

A gentleman, irreproachably dressed, goes into a confectioner's shop in Paris, and says to the polite proprietor:

"I want a hundred and fifty of the nicest cream-tarts you can make."

"A hundred and fifty! That is a pretty large order. Do you want them at once?"

"Within three hours at the latest."

"I can have them ready in that time. Ahem! It is customary to ask a deposit on such orders—say ten francs."

"Certainly, my friend. Here is your ten francs."

ACT II.

About two hours later a gentleman, irreproachably dressed, goes into a tailor's shop across the way from the pastry-cook's, and asks to be shown some overcoats. He selects one of the nicest, and asks the price.

"One hundred and twenty-five francs, sir."

"Very well; I will take it. I have some money to collect at the confectioner's across the way. I presume you have no objection to let one of your young men come over with me to get it?"

"Certainly not. A worthy man is my friend Mr. Puff."

ACT III.

To confectioner enter irreproachably dressed gentleman, now wearing an overcoat, and tailor's young man.

The confectioner greets the former with the respectful friendliness due to a good customer.

"Ah, Puff, I've called round for that one hundred and fifty. You promised to have them for me at two-thirty."

"You shall have them in five minutes, sir."

"Very well. I have to go round the corner to see a man. You will give this young gentleman one hundred and twenty-five of the one hundred and fifty. I will return and get the remaining twenty-five myself in a few moments."

"With pleasure, sir."

ACT IV.

Five minutes later the confectioner gives the tailor's young man one hundred and twenty-five cream-tarts, and a bill for balance thereon, twenty-one francs twenty-five centimes. One minute thereafter a confectioner and a tailor's young man are scouring the neighborhood in search of an irreproachably dressed gentleman with a new overcoat.

THE DEATH-TRAP.

BY GUY DECKER.

Mr. Warren, the mate of the whale-ship *Roberts*, was loved and respected by every man in the vessel, with the exception of Harry Thompson—a tall, dark-browed youth, of an evil, quarrelsome disposition. Thompson had taken a dislike to the mate from the moment he discovered that the latter was a man calculated to win the esteem of his crew. He—Thompson—had hoped to excite the men to mutiny; but when he perceived how kindly they were treated by the first officer, he knew that to accomplish his purpose he must first remove Warren from his path. Night and day, therefore, he watched for an opportunity to take the life of the mate—to strike the murderous blow in such a way as to avoid detection.

Days, weeks, and months glided on; the ship rounded the stormy Cape Horn, bowling along toward the sperm-whale cruising-ground off the Gallipagos, and still the dark-browed villain waited for a chance to accomplish his fiendish work.

One evening, just after sundown, while the hands were eating their supper, the well-known cry of "There she blows!" came down from the masthead, causing every man to spring to his feet.

Whales were discovered about a league off the lee bow, and the captain, having ordered the main yard to be hauled aback, darted aloft with his glass slung over his shoulder.

Soon after he was heard ordering his mates to lower away their boats.

With a glad shout the men sprang to the davits, the ropes slid through the tackle-blocks, and the boats, dropping into the water, were soon manned.

"Give way, lads!" cried the mate, seizing his steering-oar. "Give way with a will!"

"Aye, aye," responded his crew, and the voice of Thompson, who pulled the bow oar, was the loudest.

A strange light shone in his evil eyes; his teeth were compressed; he seemed to think the moment for which he had waited so long was at hand.

The four boats glided swiftly over the long, heavy swells, so common in the Pacific, the mate taking the lead, and in a short time the spouting of a whale was heard a few fathoms ahead.

"Your paddles, men—your paddles!" gritted the first officer through his clenched teeth. "Stand up, Hal!"

Hal was the boat-steerer, or harpooner. He sprang lightly to his feet, his iron ready in his hand.

But just as the mate was on the point of shouting the familiar order: "Give it to him!" the monster of the deep turned flukes and disappeared.

Warren fairly turned pale with disappointment.

"It's too bad," he sighed. "The twilight is closing around us now, and it'll soon be too dark to see the whale, even if he comes up."

"I think you're mistaken, sir," said the harpooner. "Yonder"—pointing to the east—"is the top of the moon's disk, just lifting above the sea. We'll have light enough, I reckon, to see that humpbacked chap when he comes up again."

"Aye, aye, you are right, Hal," answered the mate, rubbing his hands. "I never before whaled it by moonlight, but we'll have a chance to do so now, for I'll keep on that fellow's track until we get a chance to plant an iron in his hump, if it takes me all night. This is our first lowering since we sailed, and blow me if I don't mean that it shall be a lucky one. Pull ahead!"

The crew obeyed, and in the course of half an hour the spout of the whale was seen rising like a jet of liquid silver about a quarter of a mile ahead of the boat. The moon had by this time risen high above the horizon, sprinkling water-stars all over the surface of the sea.

"Pull ahead—stretch yourselves, my lads!" cried the mate. "We'll soon have an iron in that chap ahead."

The men pulled with a will, and in a short time the boat was within six fathoms of the monster.

"Stand up, Hal!"

And the boat-steerer sprang to his feet.

"Give it to him!"

The harpoon clove the air with a rushing sound, and was buried to the socket in the hump. Then came the order to "stern!" and, as the whale sounded, the mate and his boat-steerer changed places.

The boat was now rushing through the water with the speed of lightning, the spray foaming and boiling around her bows, and her gunwales forward almost on a level with the surface of the water.

With a triumphant flash lighting his snakelike eyes, Thompson stooped sideways from his thwart to unlash one of the lances secured to the side of the boat.

"Quick! Quick, my man! Hurry up with that lance!" exclaimed the mate, stretching out his hand to receive the weapon.

"Aye, aye, sir," answered Thompson, in a hoarse voice; and suddenly rising up, with the deadly steel in his hand, he contrived to stumble in such a manner as would, he hoped, cause the blade of his weapon to pierce the bosom of the mate.

The latter, however, avoided the stroke by stepping nimbly to one side, when, with pretended anxiety, Thompson quickly rose, declaring that he never could have forgiven his awkwardness if the mate had suffered from it.

"Don't mention it," exclaimed Warren. "Accidents will happen sometimes. You were not to blame for stumbling;" and he took the lance from the other's hand.

Foiled in this attempt upon the life of the man he hated, Thompson quickly resolved to make another. The slackening of the line soon afforded him the opportunity he craved. While the men were hauling upon the rope, he contrived, unobserved, to twist into several kinks the part which was nearest to the mate, just as the whale came looming up from the ocean within darting distance of the boat.

"Now, then," Thompson mentally exclaimed, "the moment the whale sounds, one of the kinks I have prepared will become entangled about the mate's legs, or his neck, and drag him overboard. There goes the lance," he continued, aloud, as Warren hurled the weapon, with unerring aim, into the monster's body.

Up went the flukes of the whale, and the next moment he disappeared a second time beneath the green chambers of the sea.

Then, as the line ran whipping through the chocks of the boat, the kinks which had been arranged by Thompson to ensnare the life of the mate flew upward like writhing serpents, forming a "bight," which, glancing past the first officer as he dodged to avoid it, caught tightly around the neck of the villain who had prepared the infernal trap, and dragged him overboard with the velocity of a cannon-ball.

The mate instantly severed the line with a blow of his hatchet; but Thompson was never seen again by the crew of the *Roberts*.

A few days afterward the whale was recaptured, killed, and towed to the ship.

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